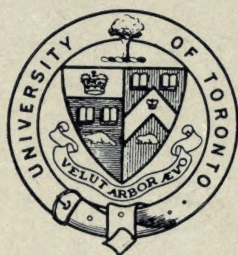


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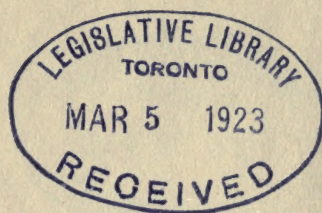
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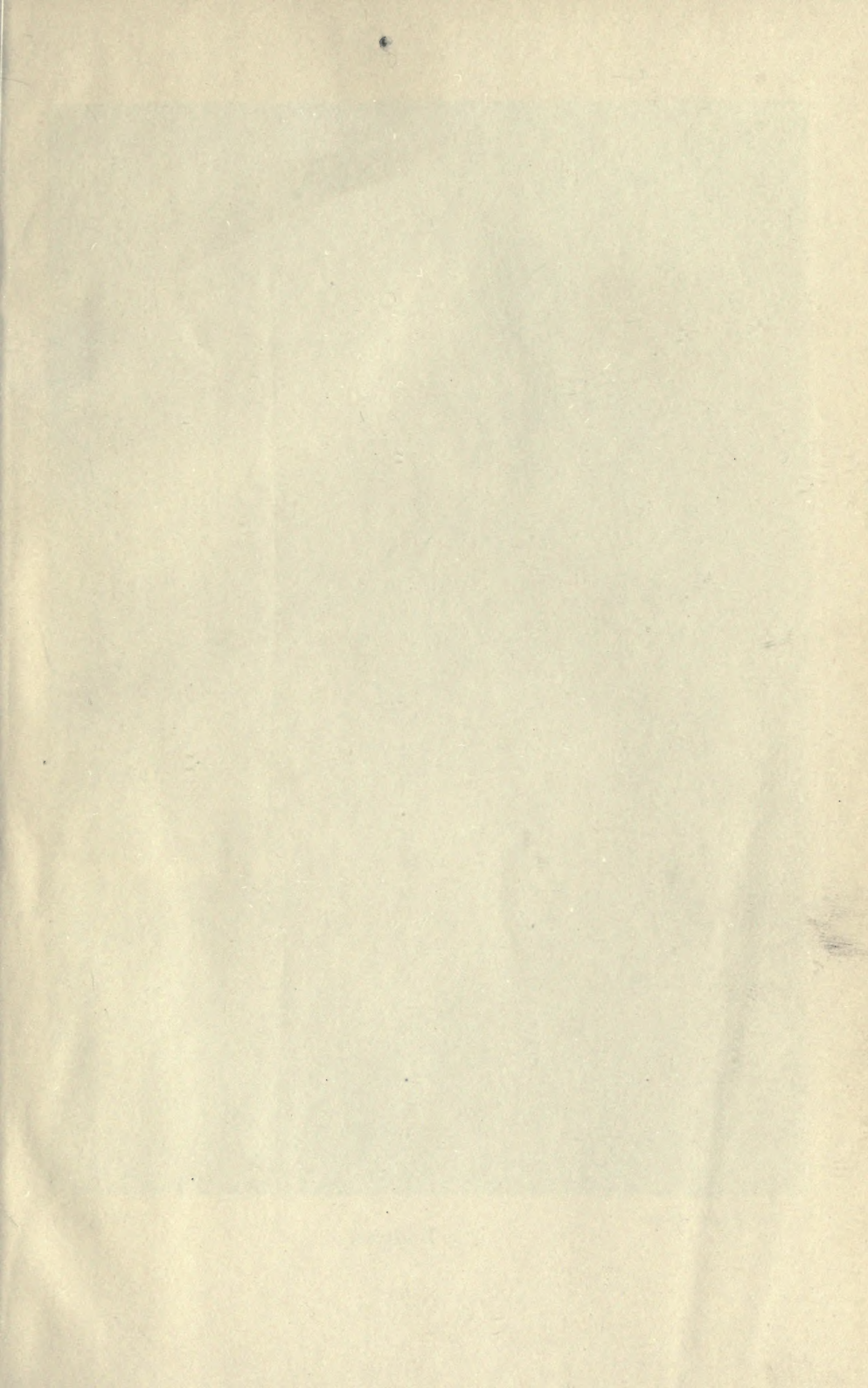
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FROM THE WINGS



Very grateful thanks are due to Sir Frank and Lady Benson, Madame Yvette Guilbert, Mrs. Kendal, Miss Ellen Terry, and the other kind friends who have given unpublished photographs for inclusion in this work.

“THE CAT.”





Photograph: Swaine.

The Editress.

Frontispiece.

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FROM THE WINGS

by

“THE STAGE CAT”

Edited by

ELISABETH FAGAN

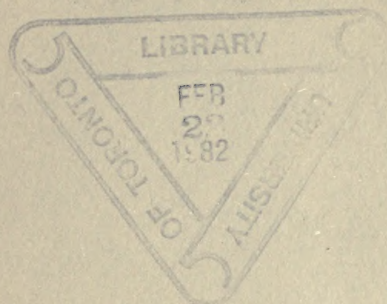


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TO ALL OLD BENSONIANS

"No offence i' the world"

Hamlet, Act iii. Scene ii.

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CHAPTER I

Interest—An Explanation—Miss Geneviève Ward—Then and Now—Training—The Joy of Life—Introductions—I see Mr. George Alexander—A Matinée Idol—Fred Terry—A Drive with Mrs. Kendal—Ellen Terry—Rehearsing—Henry Irving—Sarah Bernhardt—Eleanora Duse.

"KEEP your interest, child," said Miss Geneviève Ward to me, "and you need never grow old"; and indeed Dame Geneviève ought to know, for only a little while ago I was present at her eighty-fifth birthday party and she seemed the youngest soul among us all.

It is only interest that makes a thing worth doing, or living, and it is because it is interesting, and because, belonging to it, one meets interesting people, that I hold my little brief for the actor's life.

It is, then, about these same interesting people, that I—with no claim to interest—intend to write, but all the same I ask you to grant me your patience, at times, when I may seem to you to be writing about myself instead. It is necessary and it "comes that way," in order to make clear how I met those same interesting ones; the only excuse for prattle of this sort being, I think, that it is personal prattle, and that the stories are—with one or two exceptions—at first hand.

I was quite a girl when, on the death of my

mother, I found that I had to make my own way in the world; and as I had already done a little amateur acting—and, of course, enjoyed the usual school theatricals—I decided at once that I would go on the stage.

I had not the faintest idea how to set about it, and no connection whatever with any one theatrical: but I was determined somehow or other to become an actress, and an old family friend, Edgar Pember-ton, then editor of the *Birmingham Post*, gave me an introduction to Miss Geneviève Ward—Dame Geneviève Ward, D.B.E., she is now—to see if she thought it worth while to take me as a pupil, and to put me in the right way. He knew that Miss Ward never encouraged any one to take up the stage as a profession whom she did not consider would have a fair chance of making good.¹

As the result of this introduction, I came to London to see the “Grand Old Lady”; not old then. She was nearer sixty than fifty, but so active and so vital that she could work harder and do more than many other women forty years younger. I remember how, even five or six years later, she walked to

¹Since these recollections were written Dame Geneviève Ward has passed from us, and I feel that I may have spoken somewhat flippantly of her kindness to me; if this is so, from my heart I cry “Mea culpa”; but I know that had she read it—and she was looking forward to doing so—she would only have laughed.

The last time I heard her voice was on the telephone not many days before her death. Having seen her the day before and found her very ill, I rang up just before starting for France, to inquire the latest news. Her own voice answered me full and strong as ever.

“Hallo, Iona! I’m better, wonderfully better, downstairs and just off to my Fête for the Little Sisters—(a Charity Fête she had organised). Have a nice holiday, my dear, and don’t break too many hearts.”

my wedding, all the way from St. John's Wood to Buckingham Gate, through Regent's Park, Hyde Park, and St. James's; was present at the church—the life and soul of the lunch which followed—and then walked home again. Nowadays one has to own that she is a little older—eighty-five—and she is proud of it, but there is still not a minute in the day in which she is not busy, working for some one else, sewing by hand, or by machine, at clothes for poor children, shirts, endless garments for hospitals—and, when all other work is finished for the moment, rolling paper spills while she talks to you—anything sooner than have those wonderful hands idle for a moment. As for her powers of acting, every one who saw her at the Old Vic, a year or so ago, knows whether they have failed.

I must own in honesty that I still hold her in considerable awe, and when I go to call upon her it is hard to realise that I am not again the ignorant little novice who came to London to take lessons, she is so very clever, so very downright, and so very frank in her dislike of most of the present-day habits (I never dare suggest so much as a cigarette after tea!). One of her pet aversions is the present fashion for open necks on day dresses—she says that every woman's chest nowadays looks like raw beef!—so I am always very careful to muffle up my throat when I go to see her. The last time that I went I was wearing what I thought was a very pretty new frock, and as it was summer it was not altogether easy to cover the offending nakedness; however, I persevered, and at a con-

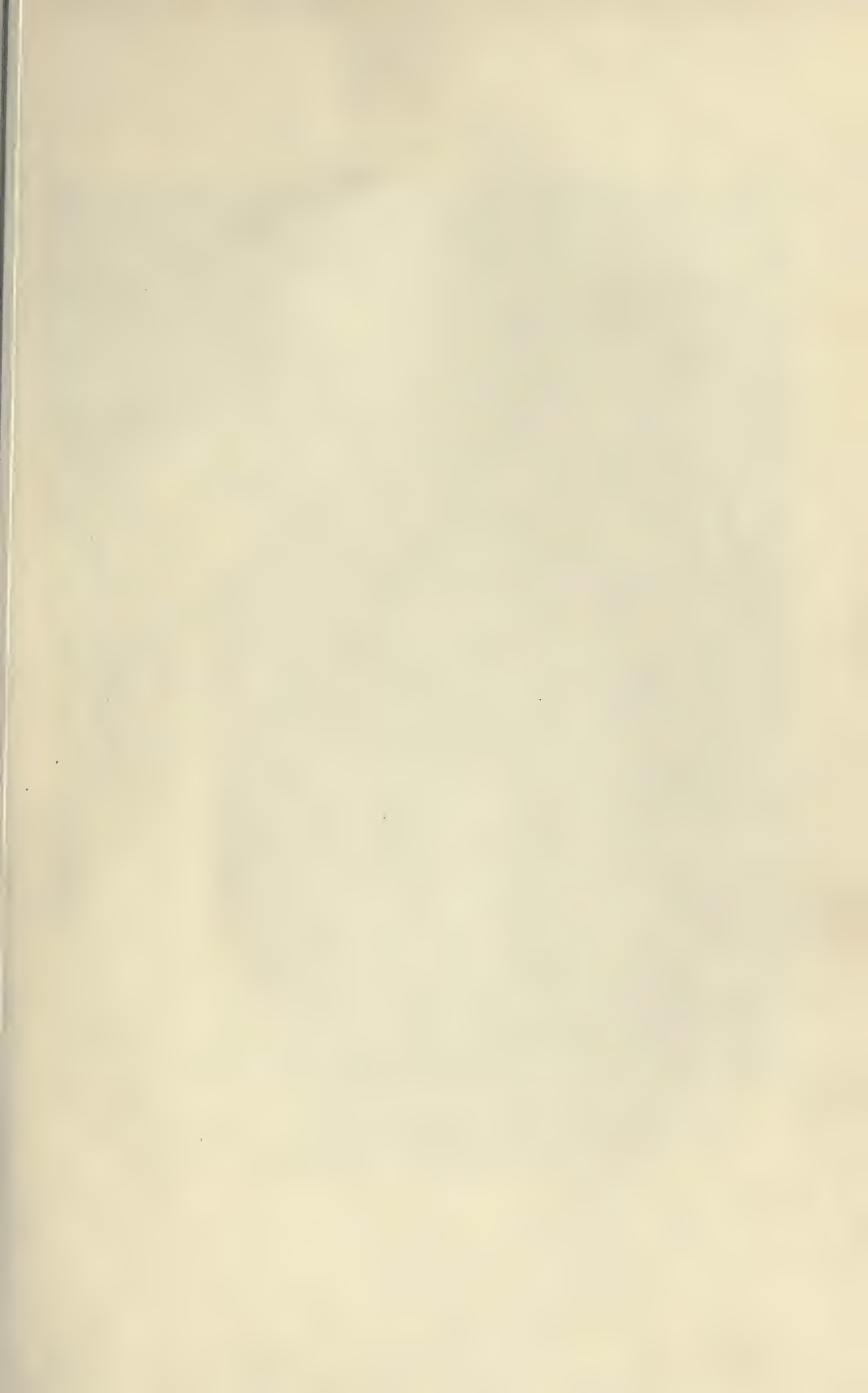
siderable loss of *chic* and much lace, the thing was done. I noticed something disapproving about Dame Geneviève's manner from the moment I entered, and puzzled myself as to what could be the reason, until I found that her eyes were fixed upon my arms, and remembered that I was wearing short sleeves.

"Iona," she said sharply—(Iona is her own special name for me, why, I don't know, but, as she says it, it sounds most attractive)—"that's a most unbecoming length of sleeve! Neither one thing nor another. You ought to have frills on." And she called to her maid to bring me a pair of muslin wrist frills which she had once worn.

"Put those on your arms at once," she ordered, "and cover them up!" Figure it to yourself! Elbow frills on a chemise dress!

You must not think, though I laugh a little, that I am not grateful to her, and appreciate most deeply the honour of her friendship all these years—a loyal, true friendship it has indeed been.

To return to our first meeting. It was arranged that she should take me as a pupil, so to London I came, to a boarding-house—in the Cromwell Road it was. My goodness, how happy I was! and how I enjoyed every minute of the day. Can't you fancy it? A little country girl in London, staying on her own, and beginning to touch for the first time the fringe of that wonderful world—the Stage. For every one even distantly connected with "The Stage" was wonderful to me then. Think what it must have been to hear such names





Dame Geneviève Ward, D.B.E., on her 85th birthday. *To face page 5.*
From a painting by Hugh G. Riviere.

as Madge (Mrs. Kendal), Nell (Miss Terry), The Chief (Irving), said as if they meant no more than Tom or Dick or Harry might mean to me : and even to meet them sometimes ! . . . I know I kept a diary recording the "marvellous" events that were happening to me, and I know that when I woke in the mornings I could have hugged myself with joy that there was another "wonderful" day before me. Oh! youth, youth! How I envy that child—to wake in the morning and be glad to be alive! Think of it, my disillusioned contemporaries—who have known life—the Great War—and Peace.

I wonder now why Miss Ward ever consented to take me as a pupil; of course, she knew that I should never make an actress—on her standard of what an actress should be—any little talent I had was entirely for comedy, with my round, baby face and the pink and white prettiness of youth; and to hear me struggling through Queen Katherine, or Lady Macbeth, must have been torture to her. However, she stuck to it, and was more than kind and helpful, and I worked hard to get my voice right: "Ah-h-h-h from the chest, my dear," she would say, "like this," giving out a stupendous note that would have filled the Albert Hall to its backmost corner—and I "ah'd" and "oh'd" in my own tiny bedroom with such vigour that the other guests at the boarding-house thought I was ill, and on finding I was not, made such a very strong remonstrance to the hostess that I had to modify my exercises.

I learnt other parts, too, besides Lady Macbeth; Rosalind, Helen in *The Hunchback*, Portia: they were a sheer delight. Then there were the talks after the lessons when, besides hearing about the giants of the profession, I learnt many things that have been useful to me in after life. One saying of hers I remember particularly. Something had upset me, some personal trouble, and I had been crying before I went to my lesson. She noticed this at once and asked the reason, and when I told her she said, "Don't regret it, my dear—it's an experience—never regret any experience, it teaches you how to feel."

In talking about Dame Geneviève, one must not forget her little dog; when I first knew her she had a wee toy terrier called Marianto, but to her great grief Marianto died of old age, and now she has another little dog of the same breed, named Gip, who, in spite of being nine years old (but mere years do not count in that house) is as frisky as a puppy, with a most beautiful slim figure and glossy black coat: possibly his youthfulness may be caused by his diet, which consists of milk, chopped meat, dry toast and fruit; but more probably he has learnt the secret from his mistress!

In addition to helping me with advice and teaching, Miss Ward gave me introductions to managers. The first manager that she sent me to was Sir George—then Mr.—Alexander. I had never before been to see a manager, and I felt quite annoyed at first that he did not get up when I came in, but remained seated, while I stood!

I didn't understand then, that to him I was merely an applicant for a situation, nothing more. (Some managers are different, of course ; it is entirely a matter of point of view.) He was quite kind though, and, oh! so handsome. He asked me to take off my hat, and said he "feared I was too tall, but he would bear me in mind." (I got to know that dismal sentence better as time went on.) "Then," stammered I feebly, "you've nothing for me?"

"Nothing at all—not at present," he replied, "but you may tell every one that you've seen me. I know you girls like to say that," and the great man gave me one of his well-known irresistible and slightly crooked smiles.

Everything was so perfectly ordered at the back of the house at the St. James's! No noise, no confusion, felt-slippered stage hands—respectful attendants—no followers allowed: I mean no visitors in the dressing-rooms. Even the stage-door keeper (that veritable ogre to the unknown aspirant, and one of the worst things she has to face when seeking an engagement) was polite, and apologised for being obliged to ask me to wait at the stage-door till Mr. Alexander was ready to see me, but some great lady—Lady Jeune, I think it was—was having tea in the green room, or I should have been allowed to wait in there.

I have often thought that it must be very difficult, very, very difficult, for a man, if he is exceptionally handsome, and a successful actor-manager, to keep his head down to quite the right dimensions.

It really is not the poor man's fault, women do

make such idiots of themselves over actors, and the women of the company are just as bad—especially the beginners—but then, of course, poor dears, they have the most to gain. I have even heard of one “*Matinée-Idol*” manager—I won’t vouch for the truth of this, it is not a personal story—who was obliged to have a notice put up on the “call-board”: “Walk-on ladies are requested not to bow to Mr. ——— when they meet him in the street.”

I suppose that handsome actors do possess an irresistible attraction for young girls.

I remember once taking the part of a milkmaid in a play in which Mr. Fred Terry was the hero—and a kinder, more delightful man to act with can never have walked the boards; there was a scene, a farm-yard, in which three or four girls were on with me, also dressed as milkmaids (we looked very attractive!), and every night Fred Terry used to stand in the entrance waiting for his cue to come on, and gazing “with all his soul in his eyes” at one or the other of us; at least that is what *we* thought, and heated arguments used to go on in the dressing-room as to which one it was. Alas! we didn’t know that he was so short-sighted he could not possibly have seen any one at that distance, and was probably totally unaware of whether any one of us was pretty or not. I say “probably,” one must not be too sure of these things! Please remember, in extenuation of this story, that we were very young beginners, and that to us Mr. Terry was an Olympian.

I wonder if the short-sightedness of the Terry family does not add something to their wonderful Terry charm—it's a great advantage to an actor to be able to look unutterable things when really seeing nothing at all.

To Mr. and Mrs. E. S. Willard, Miss Ward also introduced me. I never knew any one enjoy a joke—especially a practical one—more than Mr. Willard, in private life, I mean; as a manager he was very much the great man.

And Mrs. Kendal was another stage celebrity whom I was fortunate enough to meet. She is another wonderful woman—honestly, she hardly seems to have altered one bit since those days, and she is just as kind and gracious as ever. The expression “gracious” always seems so particularly appropriate to Mrs. Kendal—is it something about the way in which her hair waves from a centre parting which suggests the word? One day, I remember, she took me for a drive, and though it was out of our way, we had to return down Pall Mall so that Willie (Mr. Kendal) might see her and wave to her from his club window. It was a daily custom of theirs, this little ceremony, and she “wouldn't break tryst with Willie for any one,” she said.

But overshadowing all other days in awe and excitement was the day on which I was taken to be introduced to Ellen Terry! Miss Ward must have been playing at the Lyceum then, for she took me on to the stage one morning and introduced me to the great actress, whom, of course,

I had worshipped ever since, as a little girl, I had had the joy of seeing her as Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*. And she was just as adorable in ordinary life! She shook hands with me and laughed: "You're wearing my brooch," she said, and pointed to a little old-fashioned thing set with pearls that I had on—then she frisked off, picked up a shawl and began running round the stage with it floating after her, for all the world like the most delicious kitten running after its own tail. She was trying this effect for a play they were rehearsing—something to do with the French Revolution it was—in which she was to take the part of a quite young girl; one scene was laid in the girl's bedroom, and when the play was produced she held the house spellbound for minutes while she ran about with a shawl in the way that I had watched her rehearsing, pretending that it was a train. Only a little while ago I reminded Miss Terry of that scene of the long past, and tears filled her beautiful eyes as she said simply, "Was I nice?" Was she nice! Was there ever anything so nice, so adorable as Ellen Terry, or any one so much and so rightly loved? It must be worth while living to grow old—to have made so many people love you, and given pleasure to so many as she has. Think of it! All the hundreds of sad hearts she has charmed, the hundreds of dreary lives she has brightened, if only for a hour or two. It is a fine record to leave behind.

Grace and Ellen Terry were one—graceful movement was as much a part of her as it is of

running water. Of course, when the play required it she could be absolutely still and express everything without movement of either face or hands. Witness her old woman in that Dutch play, *The Good Hope*.

It is a sort of mesmeric power, I fancy, that power of getting over the footlights without words or movement, the exact feeling of the character being enacted at the moment. I do not know much about the Movies, but I notice that the best movie actors have it; I don't mean when they "close up"—isn't that the name?—an enormous face thrown on the screen and great tears slowly trickling down it; that is a trick almost any one can do (and there's always vaseline to give assistance). I mean when the actor's face is absolutely still and yet you *know* how he is suffering, a sort of telepathic current seems to flow from him and to make you feel *with* him, not see him feel. The Japanese actor Haya-kama has this power very markedly.

I am afraid that I have wandered a long way from my subject, and I apologise. To return to Miss Terry, she had, of course, this power, but when it was not needed she loved to move, to swim about the stage—not a human's swimming: a bird's, say a swan's—and when it was not essential to the play that she should be in any particular position, one never could be quite sure which exit she would take, or from which side she would address one.

"The Chief" (Sir Henry Irving), on the contrary, found a slight difficulty in moving about the stage, and he always had every movement planned out

exactly at rehearsal : " Five steps up stage and turn " sort of thing. Once, in the early days of a production, when positions were being arranged, Miss Terry said, running up to the extreme back of the stage,—

" I shall stand here, Henry, like this, and you come up to me."

" Ah, yes, yes," replied Sir Henry, " quite effective, but how shall I get there ? "

" Take a hansom," laughed Miss Terry. (Taxis were not yet in existence.)

The Chief must have been in a very good humour that morning, and Miss Terry must have known it, for as a rule he was a very " great man " at rehearsal, and his company very much in awe of him.

Marvellous organiser and producer as Sir Henry was, he was easily put " off his stride " in the little affairs of life. I have heard how, when Miss Terry first went to see him as manager of the Lyceum, the whole interview was spoilt by the misbehaviour of his pet cat, and his utter inability to cope with the situation or suggest a move into another room!

Both Eleanora Duse and Sarah Bernhardt played in London that season, so I had the chance of seeing them both and comparing their methods—such a chance for a young actress! How many hot afternoons did I not spend leaning over the bar—(the brass one, please, not the other!)—of the gallery at Daly's or the Adelphi.

Duse stole the heart out of one's breast—she could hold it in her beautiful hands and do with it what she would. Time after time, when the play





Ellen Terry with her grandniece, little June Morris. *To face page 12.*

was over, I had to walk about back streets, or—don't be shocked—go into a church to have my cry out before daring to face the people in bus or train for home.

I never saw an actress who had so absolute a sway over her audience, for laughter or tears, as Duse, except perhaps one—Yvette Guilbert, and she—— Well, I will tell you about her later on.

CHAPTER II

My First Engagement—Lewis Waller and H. H. Morell—Lily Hanbury—Waller's Kindness and Self-Control—Proof Incontrovertible—Disappointment—"The Rise of Dick Howard"—On the Stage and Behind it—Rehearsals—Second Understudy—Marion Terry—H. V. Esmond—Annie Hughes—A Male Malaprop—First Night Hopes—The Notice Up—Optimists—The Yorkshire Backer—Looking for Work—My First Interview with Mr. F. R. Benson—The Mercy Speech—Blackmore's Agency—The Anxious Actress and the Horrid Boy—"I'll bear you in mind"—Lunch—The Darker Side—White Gloves—Silk Petticoats—Mental, Material, or Moral.

At last I obtained my first engagement. It was with Lewis Waller and H. H. Morell. They had just formed a partnership and were going to produce *The Idler* at the Haymarket Theatre, and I was to walk on and understudy Lily Hanbury, that beautiful and sweet girl who was already a great favourite with the public. Alas for my hopes! When the time came for rehearsals to begin, I was so ill that, although I managed to struggle to the theatre, I was immediately sent back home again, and had to remain in a nursing home for two months.

Waller was exceptionally kind. He kept the position open for me for quite a long time, but of course *The Idler* was produced before I was well enough to join.

Lewis Waller was a really fine man. I do not

mean fine only in appearance ; of course he was that—he had, I believe, at that time replaced George Alexander in the hearts of the matinée girls—his photograph was in all their bedrooms, and one girl I knew even pinned it in her berth to look at when crossing to America ; she said he was a certain cure for sea-sickness. Why, I do not know! Waller was fine in character also. Very many helpful and generous things he did, both for his company and other people, but as most of the recipients are still alive, I must not mention them now. He seemed the ideal “ strong, silent man ” of the novels of the nineties.

A long time after my first unfulfilled engagement, I was in the same company with him on tour, in *Julius Cæsar*, in which he was playing Brutus. One night I had finished my part and was watching the great tent scene from the wings—it is a long, trying scene, as you know, and Waller was superb in it, and always roused the house to immense enthusiasm. That night, however, one of the two Roman soldiers who come on with a message at the end of the act was so drunk that he could not say his lines; he hiccoughed and stammered, and at last stumbled over his own feet and fell sprawling on the floor. Of course the whole effect of the scene was gone ; the audience tittered and the curtain had to be quickly rung down. Waller was more than angry—he was furious, and, clenching his hands, he strode to where the drunken man lay and drew back his foot to kick him, then, just as quickly he pulled himself together, turned on his

heel without speaking, and walked quietly away. His self-control was really fine.

He was a very popular man, too; perhaps even more popular with men than with women (if one excepts the *matinée* girls, who can hardly be counted as fully fledged women), and a very jolly companion. I remember a rather nice little story about him. One night there was a big theatrical dinner, for men only, and things were very gay; most of the guests did better than merely "look upon the wine when it was red," Waller among the rest. Next day when he entered the Green Room Club a friend called out,—

"Hallo, Will, old man" (his real name was William), "a bit squiffy last night, eh, what?"

"Squiffy!" said Waller, "not a bit of it. I rode all the way home on my bike and twice round the dinner-table when I got there. Call that squiffy!"

But to return to my disappointment. When I was well again Mr. E. S. Willard engaged me to "walk on" at the Garrick in a new play he was putting on there, called *The Rise of Dick Halward*. (I think it was by Jerome.) And so at last my dream came true, and I was "on the stage." I was not very much "on" it in reality, I may remark, only for about ten minutes! I was a guest at an evening party, and most of even those ten minutes was spent walking about with another girl on a balcony at the back—still I was "on," I was a real professional actress, and very happy. It was all so new and so interesting, and for the first time I was earning my own living,

"thirty shillings a week, and find my own dress." Friday night is treasury night in the theatre world—when the "ghost walks" (that is the stage slang for it; I do not know the origin of the expression), and the salary is brought round to us in little envelopes—that alone is something pleasant to look forward to; the contents of the envelopes I mean, of course. Then I thought a theatre dressing-room was the most interesting place I had ever been in, and stayed there as long as I could every night, instead of hurrying away and getting home, as one is so anxious to do in later years. Making up, too, was a joy—smothering one's face in scented cold cream and dabbing on powder with a free hand. I did not so much enjoy the really difficult achievement of getting black grease paint to stick on one's eyelashes by means of a hot hair-pin (that at least is the way we did it), and I own that it is an art I have never properly mastered: the horrid, hot stuff always will drop on to my dressing-gown, or my cheek, instead of sticking in big lumps on my eyelashes. Actresses nowadays have probably a much easier way of attaining the desired effect. The girls who dressed in the same room at the Garrick were very nice (Winifred Fraser was one), and they helped me with my make-up, and did not let me go on the stage looking like a clown with red and white in patches, which often happens when beginners first start to paint their faces.

Miss Marion Terry was the leading lady in *Dick Halward*—gracious and exquisite as she always is—and there was also a beautiful American girl

called Keith Wakeman; Annie Hughes, too, who played quite a young girl's part, with her hair down. What a delightful actress Annie Hughes was—is still, no doubt, only she has deserted us for America. H. V. Esmond, too, was in the cast. I shall have much to tell you about him later; and Bassett Roe, and “handsome Jack Barnes,” still with considerable claim to that title, though growing a little bit middle-aged. There was also a quite delightful boy walking on whose name wild horses will not drag from me, because he is now extremely well known and enormously admired by all theatre-goers. He was a very handsome youth, who had, I think, been a lawyer's clerk before going on the stage, and he was very anxious to do the right thing and hide any deficiencies that there might be in his education. He was what was called “intense” in those days—he read more than he could assimilate in his desire to appear cultured, and had the quaintest way of using the wrong words when trying to talk in a would-be brilliant manner. We got a great deal of joy out of some of his remarks. He was engaged to a very nice girl, and she endeavoured to cure him of this habit sometimes. All the same, I remember that when I congratulated him after his wedding, he said,—

“Thank you, it was very beautiful. Our marriage was consummated on the altar of St. Mary Abbott's, Kensington.”

Perhaps, after all, his wife has not altogether succeeded in curing this actor of his love of phrases,

for, years after the Garrick season, he was telling a party of old friends about a bad time he had been through, with no engagements, and how he had been obliged to sell all his furniture, bit by bit, even to the bed.

"That broke my poor wife's heart," he said, "to think that sacrilegious hands should be laid on the spot where we had spent so many happy hours." He is a dear fellow and a fine actor, all the same, and shouldn't you like to know who he is?

The rehearsals were a revelation to me. I used to sit in the stalls with the other girls—not daring even to whisper, for Mr. Willard was very strict; he would have no whispering, and had remarkably sharp ears—watching them, and taking mental notes; and then one day, greatly daring, I ventured to ask Mr. Willard if I might have an understudy. It was rather cheek worrying Mr. Willard about a little thing like this, and the other girls gasped when I told them, for we all held him in much awe; but either my cheek, or my youth, or my very evident terror, must have amused him, for he laughed and said, "Certainly you may understudy Miss Terry, her second understudy."

I have never heard of a second understudy since, except in the long runs of musical comedies, where principals are often off for weeks at a time, but I did not know that then, and went promptly to the stage manager to demand the part to learn. Naturally he was not going to be bothered with second understudies, and he told me so quite clearly; but, undeterred in the pursuit of my "career," I went

to Miss Terry herself, and told my tale, and she—bless her ! it was just like her kind heart—lent me her own part for one night, and I sat up till the small hours copying it out into a note-book so that I could have it to learn at my leisure. Need I say I was never required to play it!

We had a very grand and successful first night. Lots of well-known people came behind to congratulate Mr. Willard; and Miss Geneviève Ward even came to see me in the dressing-room—a tremendous score for me before the other girls! I remember that she looked lovely that night in gray silk, full and flowing—it was the day of long, full skirts, and very graceful they were, too. My stage dress was of pink silk, an umbrella skirt, much stiffened out at the hem with buckram, and I had a white chiffon fichu with a red rose tucked into it. I am sure I looked very nice! But alas! in spite of the grand first night, the play was not a success. It only ran for about a month, and then like a bomb-shell—a bomb-shell at least to the younger members of the company, the others had probably been expecting it—the notice went up. It is a perfectly horrid experience when one comes gaily in from the outside world, and passes the magic stage-door into the world of make-believe, to see stuck up on the notice-board, “The run of the present piece will terminate,” etc. It brings a sinking of the heart to every one in the theatre: artists, dressers, staff, every one—it may mean, for them all, being out for weeks or months with their livelihood gone.



Frank Benson in 1894.

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Actors are great optimists, though, always hoping that some miracle will happen; even when they know that the play is a failure they cling to the idea that something will occur to prevent the notice going up. Houses are so much "papered," namely, filled with complimentary ticket people, that it is difficult to say from looking at the audience whether the play is paying or not. All the same, one can "sense" a papered house pretty quickly after a time. "House looks a bit snowy to-night," an actor will say, referring to the legend that stage snow is made from the paper of torn up free passes. Still, as I say, one hopes till the very end that the luck may turn and a failure become, by some miracle, a success.

A play I was in once is an example. During rehearsals we had all been certain that it would be a failure—an "awful frost," as we called it; even to us it seemed such utter rubbish we gave it about a week's run, and were very depressed in consequence. On the first night, however, the audience was most enthusiastic—and friendly; and though the critics gave it contemptuous notices, the play continued to run to what looked like good business. Then, behind the scenes, we began to alter our tune: "The old play was not so bad after all," we said; "simple, no doubt, but the public liked that, bless 'em. Its very simplicity was its charm." "Also"—and on this point we were all unanimous—"it was jolly well acted, and good all-round acting could pull anything through." We were pleased with ourselves and with the play, and we

settled down to a really comfortable engagement. To celebrate the hundredth night we were all invited to a big supper at the Carlton, by the play's chief backer, an enormously wealthy Yorkshire man, whom I will call Huggins. After much champagne had been drunk and congratulatory speeches made by the manager, the author, the leading actor, and many others, Mr. Huggins rose to return thanks with a quite unreproducible Yorkshire accent.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I'm naw great hand at marking a speech, but I'm pleased and proud to welcome yer all here to-night. It's a foine play, and it's a foine company, and this I will say: I've troid horse-racing, I've troid card-playing, and I've troid gambling in the city, but of all pleasant ways of losing one's money—backing a play is a domned sight the pleasantest." And that was the end of our self-congratulations, and the end of the play came soon after.

So *The Rise of Dick Halward* was withdrawn, and with many tears I said good-bye to the company, quite convinced that I should never get another engagement. That, I may say, is always the settled conviction of all actors directly they are out of work—the Heavens look black all round—the theatrical Heavens, at least.

Long rehearsals and short runs are one of the drawbacks of "the Profession." Of course, since my time the Actors' Association has insisted upon payment for rehearsals—or part of them—but when I was on the stage there was no such rule, and

the smaller salaried people often suffered very much, when, as happened by no means infrequently, rehearsals lasted for six or eight weeks and the play only ran for a fortnight; indeed, in one case that I remember, we rehearsed for six weeks and were only paid for two nights—"the run of the play," as specified in our contracts—but that was with a certain manager, who, so the Green Room says, has since obtained an O.B.E. by giving £5000 to the Widow of the Unknown Soldier!

To go back to my story. In this instance I was one of the lucky ones, for before I had been out of work a week Sir Whitworth Wallis, the Curator of the Birmingham Art Gallery, gave me an introduction to Mr. F. R. Benson—not then Sir Frank—who was playing at Nottingham, and I went over there to see him. It was a bitterly cold autumn day, and my best clothes did not happen to be very thick ones—of course no aspiring actress would ever dream of going to see a manager in anything but her best. If I had only known how little impression best clothes made on Mr. Benson I might have spared myself and kept warm. I do not believe he ever noticed what a woman was wearing—off the stage—though once I do remember his remarking with approval on a white leather belt I had on: I wonder why! I expect it reminded him of a horse's girth, or something else to do with sport—but that was long afterwards; and on that November day of our first interview I sat shivering and miserable in a cold lodging-house room, waiting for him to return from a

matinée, knowing well that my nose was getting redder and redder, and my face plainer and plainer as the moments passed. At last he came, and *he* was not in the least cold, for, as usual, he had run all the way from the theatre—for the sake of exercise, not hurry—but he was very kind and courteous, and soon Mrs. Benson followed him and gave me a cup of hot tea, so that I was able to pluck up courage and ask for an engagement.

Mr. Benson told me to recite to him, and, greatly daring, I plunged into—of all things—"The Mercy Speech," and Mrs. Benson had been playing Portia that very afternoon! Poor woman, having to listen to it all over again from me! However, she endured it bravely, and perhaps my nose wasn't so very red after all—I can hardly think that it was any artistic talent that I displayed—for Mr. Benson offered me an engagement as Juno in *The Tempest* in his forthcoming production of that play at Birmingham.

Yes, I was very lucky that time. Looking for an engagement is the nastiest part of theatrical life—I mean for the small fry, the beginners, and provincial stage folk. When one has "made good" and gained even a small London reputation, there is generally no need to hunt for work; it comes along, and one is sent for by managers, but before this, for the less favoured beings, it is cruel work. The starting out in the morning, in best clothes, whatever the weather (and best so soon gets second best under these conditions), the waiting with crowds of others bent on the same

errand in the agent's office, hoping that he will at least see one, even if he has no suitable engagement to suggest; the trying to catch his eye if he happens to pass through the waiting-room; the "being nice" and smiling to the horrid office-boy—or girl—who takes one's name to the great man (or doesn't, as the case may be). They are all horrid as a species, these "officials," though, no doubt, individually they may be excellent children, for they hold the keys of bread and butter, if not of life and death, for the anxious applicant, and are nearly always head-swollen with the knowledge of this power.

Blackmore's in Garrick Street was the biggest agency in my time, and unless one arrived very early in the morning, there was nearly always a crowd of other Theatricals waiting there, and sometimes the room got so full it was difficult to move. On arrival perhaps one felt quite brave, and resolved to carry things off with a swagger, as if it did not matter in the least whether an engagement came along or no; so, with a high and mighty air, intended to give the impression that one was a leading London actress, who had just "drifted in," one went to the desk of the "horrid boy," and this sort of thing took place:—

Anxious Applicant (with great hauteur): Just take my name into Mr. Blackmore, will you? Say Miss —, please.

Horrid Boy (rudely): Got an appointment?

Anxious Applicant (a tone lower): Well, not exactly an appointment, but he told me to be sure and look in again.

Horrid Boy (with meaning): Oh! Indeed! You'd better wait. I'll see about it later.

And wait you did—perhaps for an hour, perhaps longer, with the courage oozing out of your boots and the conviction growing stronger and stronger that you'd never get a "shop," till at last you could bear it no longer, and you again approached the horrid little imp behind the desk. This time, though, you walked delicately, like the gentleman in the Bible, and smiled sweetly, even though you had murder in your heart.

"Don't you think you could get him to see me now?" you'd coo in your most dove-like voice, and the H.B. (unless he was very extra H.B.) would relent—if you were pretty—and condescend to tell you that:—

"The gov'nor wasn't coming at all that morning. It wasn't no good your waiting," or even perhaps that:—

"He'll be coming in directly; you'd better stand by the door and catch 'im."

You stood by the door, and then shortly a harassed and busy little man would attempt to hurry through the room—of course he was hurried; hadn't he been all the morning trying to satisfy the demands of insatiable London managers requiring high-salaried actors? That at least was what we were meant to think; perhaps we did.

You pounced and caught him. Cornered like that, he was probably kind, if you were good to look upon (again that same "if"); after all, one never knew: you might pay him huge sums for

commission on engagements some day! So, though he didn't remember you from Eve—how should he, seeing so many girls every day?—he would press your hand and say, "Nothing to-day, dear, but I'm bearing you in mind; look in again when you're passing."

So it was of no use waiting longer. The morning was over, and one went to lunch, generally a scone and butter and cup of tea in an A.B.C., not a very good foundation for a further hunt for work in the afternoon.

No, it is not a pleasant thing looking for an engagement, and it is as well to take this side of the life into consideration when deciding to go on the stage; but of course it has its humorous side, too, and it is exciting enough when one has sufficient money in one's pocket to lunch decently and be smartly dressed.

The great secret of dressing in my time was a Silk Petticoat—petticoats were worn *then*—rustling ones; the more they rustled the better, they gave such an impression of wealth and the uselessness therefore of offering one anything less than £20 a week as salary.

White kid gloves and a rustling petticoat were really indispensable when going out to seek an engagement. There was an enormous amount of confidence to be got out of a silk petticoat! A hansom to the managers, too, was money well spent, I always thought—one felt so much less like a servant looking for a situation if one arrived in a hansom, than if one came, with the mud of the

streets on one's shoes, by the humble bus or train. (Even in those days minor actresses were less in demand than domestic servants.)

Stage life, no doubt, is not the only life in which the plums go to those who need them least, and one can understand the manager's, or agent's, point of view. Obviously a girl who has got—or can get—enough money to dress well, is a more attractive, and therefore better, proposition than an ill-dressed one.

This all sounds very trivial and rather ugly, I'm afraid, but remember, I am speaking now only of the bottom of the ladder; no doubt it is real merit which climbs to the top in the long run—at least, I hope it is—but, all the same, a "Silk Petticoat," both mental and material, is a not unuseful adjunct to the climbing. Please note that I do not say a moral silk petticoat, though—well, one has heard—! But, anyway, the morals of the stage are no worse than those of most other places. I'm sure of that.

But, as I said, I was fortunate in getting my second engagement quickly, and it was not till later that I had any experiences of looking for work, or agents, and, mercifully, not very much of it even then. Instead, I went at once into a company which of all others afforded the best possible training for a beginner, for admirable as dramatic schools and academies may be—not having had any experience of them personally, I will not venture an opinion on the subject—still, to learn one's business in actual practice in a real repertory company must surely be the sounder way.



Lady Benson as Doll Tearsheet in *Henry IV*. *To face page 29.*

CHAPTER III

The Benson Company—A Star Cast—The Influence of Shakespeare—or Benson—Mr. and Mrs. F. R. Benson—Frank Rodney—"Old Purple Face"—"The Tempest"—The Cast—Juno—Jessie Bateman—"Stage Giggles"—Save me from my Friends—A Re-Engagement.

AND so I joined the Benson company and began what, on looking back, seem to me to have been the three happiest years of my life. What a wonderful company it was! Listen to some of the names. Besides Mr. Benson and Mrs. Benson, there were in the company: Frank Rodney, Oscar Asche, E. Lyall Swete, Graham Browne, George Weir, O. B. Clarence, H. R. Hignett, Herbert Grimwood, Jessie Bateman, Eleanor Aitkin, Margaret Ormrod, and Constance Robertson.

That was the company when I joined; later on came Henry Ainley, Matheson Lang, Leslie Faber, Arthur Whitby, H. O. Nicholson, Julian L'Estrange, Charles Quartermaine, Lily Brayton, Lilian Braithwaite, Madge McIntosh, Nancy Prince, Hutin Britton, Francis Weatherall, and ever so many others whose names I cannot recall at the moment. It really seems as if one can hardly mention the name of any successful actor or actress nowadays without hearing that, at one time or another, they have been in the Benson company. There had been "giants" in it, too, before my

time: Louis Calvert, Stephen Phillips, Otho Stuart, Beatrice and Ada Ferrar, and Alfred Brydone among them.

The list reads like the programme of a Gala Performance, and yet, remember, we were only a touring company—touring the provinces—and making a success of it. With no plays but Shakespeare's (and a few Old Comedies), with no big London reputation to attract: "Huge London Success" on the hoardings, in letters a yard long; no marvellous stage effects or scenery to draw big audiences; nothing but the name "F. R. Benson" to assure the public that they would get Shakespeare, and a good all round show. (Oh! some more, and some less, good, I admit, but that was inevitable.) And the public trusted the name, and they came, always in larger numbers on our second visit than on our first—that is (and it seldom happened) unless they could not be made to appreciate us at all, and we had to shake off the dust of our feet against them, never to return.

They got to know us, too—the public—and to compare our performances in different plays, also to give their favourites a welcoming round of applause on their entrance, which was friendly and pleasant.

There was a real *esprit de corps* in the company—a high level aimed at and real interest and earnestness in our work, though most of us would have been quite angry if we had been told so; we always jeered at the traditional earnest actor. I wonder why! But it is a popular pose on

the stage, and the merest pose after all. There certainly was something about that company which I have never met in any other; for one thing, we heard the words of Shakespeare every day, and surely that must make some difference. If one lives long enough with beauty—getting it every day in small doses—even though it be mixed with the dust and tawdryness of the footlights—some of it must sink in in time. Frank Rodney used to say that no man who really loved Shakespeare could possibly live an ugly life. Perhaps that is going too far, but, be that as it may, I know that it was a clean and healthy life that we led. I do not mean to say, of course, that the company was not human; it was—very—we were only boys and girls; but we were healthy boys and girls, and I do not believe that any real ugliness would have been tolerated among us for very long.

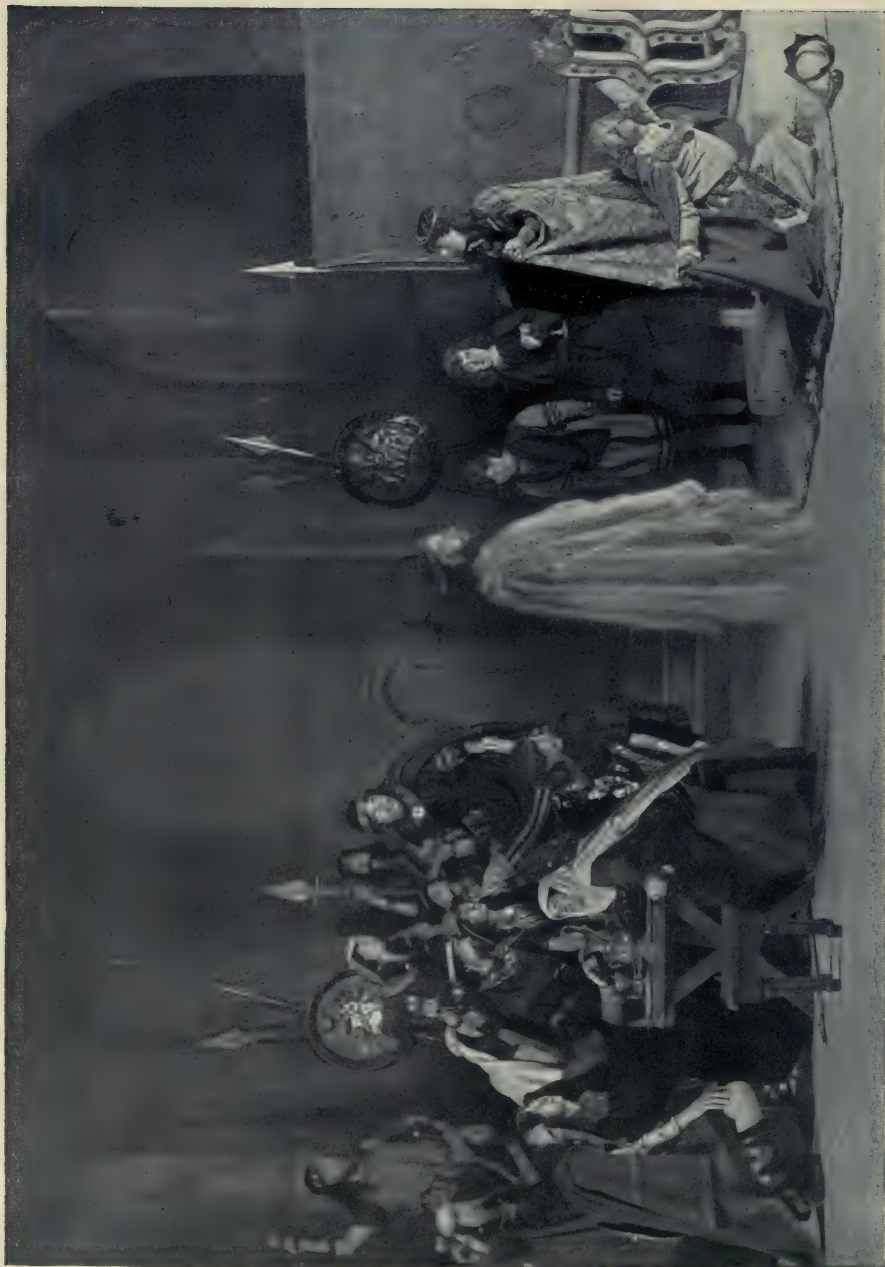
Of course, much of this tone was due to the influence of Mr. and Mrs. Benson. Frank Benson, beside being an artist, was a sportsman; a sportsman-idealist is as proper a label for him as any I can think of (if human beings can ever be properly labelled), and he possessed a wonderful power of inspiring loyalty in those around him. No doubt we of the company grizzled and grumbled and found fault with "Pa" (as I have heard that irreverent youngsters call him nowadays. We never did in my time surely—we could never have been so disrespectful!), but we loved him, and I believe that there is hardly an old Bensonian in any part of the globe to-day—and they are in a good

many parts of it—who would not do anything that they could for “F. R. B.” and be proud of the chance of doing it.

Lady Benson (Mrs. Benson then) was marvellously “one of us” and “Mrs. Benson” at the same time. I mean, for instance, that if one told a company joke to one of her ears, the other ear—the managerial one—never heard it, and one always felt that in her there was a real friend one could go to in any difficulty. She had, too (and still has), a keener sense of humour than any woman I have ever met, and could tell a story better; and with that sense of humour she had a wonderful vitality. However dismal the railway journey, or long and tiring the rehearsal, she could always make us see the comic side and cheer us up. The company adored her, and—but no, I do not want to let myself go, writing about Mrs. Benson. She has always been, and I am proud to say, still is, such a true friend to me, one does not care to write about everything.

There is no doubt that the influence of both Mr. and Mrs. Benson, plus Frank Rodney’s theory of the influence of Shakespeare—no, no, that is the wrong way round; I mean the influence of Shakespeare, plus that of Mr. and Mrs. Benson—made a very excellent blend, at the time when I was lucky enough to sample the company.

Dear Frank Rodney—“Old Purple Face” was Oscar Asche’s name for him. (Mrs. Benson used to call him “Granny”; we went in very much for nicknames at that time)—was one of the kindest,



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The Benson Co. in *Macbeth*.

sweetest souls that ever lived, and what an actor too! He played the second leads—that is the characters next to Mr. Benson's leads—and his Mercutio, his Ford, his Clarence, and his Fool in *Twelfth Night* are joys to remember. In some parts, I know, he was considered to be rather effeminate: his Brutus, for instance, was not much liked, but I had the privilege of hearing his words for that—I mean, holding the book while he was learning the part, and I know the tenderness, the greatness and the tragedy in which he conceived it. By the way, that same hearing of words was *not* generally looked upon as much of a privilege! It was difficult to get any one to do it, and only by reciprocity: "You hear me my part and I'll hear you yours" sort of thing could it be worked.

Rodney was not in the least "old," really; only about forty, I think, but he had had so much stage experience, and most of us were so very young, that he was considerably looked up to and respected, except by that irrepressible Australian, Oscar Asche, who loved "Old Purple Face" devotedly, but used to play all sorts of practical jokes on him all the same, slapping him on the back with a hand which, even in those days, was like a sledge hammer, smashing his hat, tearing his coat—there was one coat especially that he particularly objected to, I forget why, it was "old" or "ugly" or something (it probably was; Rodney cared not at all how he looked off the stage) and one day Oscar actually slit it from collar to waist at rehearsal. But Rodney never really minded for

more than a minute; he used just to shrug his shoulders and say, "That impossible boy!" and there was a genuine friendship between them to the end.

Rodney had a very red face (purple), light eyes and eyelashes, and was beginning to go a little bald, but when he was made up with a beautiful fair wig he looked so handsome that lots of silly girls fell in love with him and sent him letters from the front. We always used to chaff him about these *billet doux*, but I never heard that he returned the ladies' attentions. He was very graceful, too. I like to think of him on *Romeo and Juliet* nights dancing a *pas seul* on the stage before the curtain went up, to the music of the orchestra (generally Edward German's English Dances). He always danced like this on Romeo nights, "to get into the mood of Mercutio," he said, and he did not in the least mind how much we laughed at him about it. Every one, from Mrs. Benson to super; from "Ma Melbourne," the wardrobe mistress (Why are wardrobe mistresses always called "Ma"?) to the call-boy, liked and admired Frank Rodney, and when he died a few years later, after a painful illness, he left many sad hearts behind.

Rodney was the Ferdinand in the production of *The Tempest* at Birmingham the year I joined, and Mrs. Benson the Miranda. Mr. Benson played Caliban—a really poetic Caliban, and, of course, an extremely athletic one: he so loved climbing trees! Asche was the Prospero—a superb figure with a long gray beard, his fine voice sounding out

grandly in the magnificent lines. Margaret Ormrod was Ariel—such a sweet singer—and Jessie Bateman, Iris. Anything prettier than Jessie looked as Iris cannot be imagined—no need for paint or powder on her face. With a pink and white skin, big blue eyes, and a halo of real golden curls, she was like a little angel—a delicious doll-angel on a Christmas tree—when, as Iris, wearing a rainbow dress of thin silk, she hung on wires from the flies. She was a really clever actress even then, little Jessie, especially in boys' parts, and she had just electrified and upset the company by dancing off one morning and getting married to George Hippisley (another member of the company), she a mere baby with her hair down!

The Tempest was a special production, with a specially engaged ballet and chorus, and all the young men of the company who had not speaking parts, played the Spooks who haunted the wicked Duke; and a fine time they had, trying who could invent the most hideous make-up. They *were* hideous, too, some of their inventions: Devils, Vampires, Skeletons, "Things" with blood all over—it was as well that the Spooks only came on in a dark scene, or the children in the audience might have gone home in fits. Of course, nowadays some well-known artist like Percy Anderson, or Albert Rutherford, designs all the dresses for a production, even to those of the supers—and one must wear one's dress, or one's wig just "so," or not play the part; no doubt this is very much better and more effective for the play, but it is not nearly such fun

for the actor as building up his make-up himself.

I was engaged for Juno. Shall I ever forget that first night as Juno! My first speaking part on the real stage. Of course, I suffered agonies from nerves, and I was insufficiently rehearsed as well. Certainly the two other goddesses and I had been "run through our words" two or three times by the stage manager, in different corners of the theatre, but we had never rehearsed on the stage proper, with properties—it was too simple a scene for that to be thought necessary—and Iris and Ceres had played it before. The Goddesses had to appear on a raised platform at the back of the stage, and there was a gauze between us and the audience (mercifully, as it turned out). The scene was laid in the clouds—very realistic, billowy clouds they were—and when the curtain went up, Ceres and Iris (on wires) were awaiting the entrance of Juno, the said entrance to be a rapid descent from Heaven (the flies) down a "sunbeam," in a chariot drawn by a peacock (a real peacock, stuffed—Mr. Benson never worried about such superstitions as peacocks' feathers or Macbeth's music). The whole thing was planned to be extremely effective, you see—at least that was the producer's idea.

On that memorable first night, then, with a feeling of utter hollowness where my middle should have been, I seated myself in my chariot (a very small one), and after being duly warned to "Hold tight!" was pulled backwards up a sort of camouflaged

fire escape, called a shoot, into the flies, high up above the stage, and there I sat trembling, and feeling certain that in another minute the whole erection would swing outwards, and that I should go crashing over the footlights into the audience. I did not believe the shoot *could* be properly secured—it seemed to rock so. To the end of the run I never got over my dread of that wait in the flies, and I used to expend all my smiles (to say nothing of occasional drinks) on the stage carpenter, to ensure his not forgetting to fasten the bolts of the scaffolding safely (a most unnecessary exercise of amiability on my part, I may tell you; Needum, the carpenter, was far too good a workman ever to risk an accident of that sort happening). Up there, then, I sat that first night for what seemed ages, waiting for the cue to begin my “swift glide downwards,” and at last the cue came, sounding out from far below me:—

“Great Juno comes, I know her by her gait,”

loudly proclaimed Ceres. Ye gods! Well might she know her! for down Juno came in spasmodic jerks, the peacock plunging and rearing like a rocking-horse in front of her! The rope to which the chariot was attached, was wound round a cog-wheel turned by hand, and either I was too heavy for the man at the wheel, or the wheel itself was stiff, but whatever the cause, down in jerks I came, and I only hope I was not holding on to the side of the chariot as I did so! At last safety was

reached, I stepped out upon the rostrum with what dignity I could, and while a large hand came through the "heavens" of the back cloth and dragged my steed and chariot off, I proceeded towards the appointed spot from which to "shower my blessings." Alas, though, for dignity! my path was naturally over clouds, and those clouds being solid things of wood and pasteboard, their edges caught and held the end of my thin silk dress, till in despair, and to avoid pulling the whole of cloud-land after me, I clutched my garment up with both hands, and stepped over the solid clouds as best I could. How I managed to deliver my speech after that I don't know, but I did get it out somehow, and the lovers were duly blessed, in spite of sounds of convulsive, though stifled laughter, coming from the corner of the stage where Ferdinand and Miranda lay embraced. To this day Lady Benson gives realistic imitations of "Great Juno" high-stepping over the clouds, holding up her imperial robe and showing yards of wrinkled cotton tights. (I deny the wrinkles. I'm sure I was much too vain not to have pulled them up tightly; but the pink cotton touch is certainly true, for they were wardrobe tights, and men's at that!) Even the Tableau of Immortals at the end of the play was not altogether a triumph, for the lofty pinnacle on which Juno had to recline was such a spiky one—more like the kind of thing an old lady hangs her cap on—that the smile of beatitude with which I started slowly dissolved into one of intense agony!

That, again, is Lady Benson's version, and I dare say it is true. She certainly did have the laugh against me on that first night of *The Tempest*, but I was able to get a little of my own back before the end of the run. Do you remember the scene when Ferdinand first sees Miranda and they at once fall in love?—

FERDINAND. “ Most sure the goddess
On whom these airs attend! Vouchsafe my
prayer
May know, if you remain upon this island;
And that you will some good instruction give
How I may bear me here: My prime request,
Which I do last pronounce, is, O you wonder!
If you be maid or no? ”

MIRANDA. “ No wonder, sir,
But certainly a maid——”

But on the night I speak of—it was in Edinburgh—in answer to Ferdinand's tender query; clearly and firmly Miranda replied:—

“ A maid, sir, and no wonder! ”

Then they both realised the slip, and went into such fits of laughter that Prospero had to carry on a sort of monologue until they recovered!

It is a terrible thing to “ get the giggles,” as we call it, on the stage! Every time one tries to speak the voice coming from one's throat sounds so queer, it sets one off laughing again, and it is of no use to bite the lips and dig nails into the palms of

one's hands; the only thing to do—and it takes some doing—is to switch one's mind off the thing that has caused the laughter; and such silly little things do cause it on the stage, things that would not seem in the least funny in ordinary life! I suppose that it must be a form of nervousness.

To return to Juno. The next day one of the newspapers gave me a long and flattering notice! No doubt it was kindly meant. I expect that the critic who wrote it knew me—for I had lived in Birmingham for two or three years—and so he wanted to give me a helping hand, but I could have almost died of shame; and I hardly dared to face the company at rehearsal next morning. To notice Juno!—and such a Juno!—and to dismiss with a line or two the other really important parts! Of course, the company must have resented it in their hearts, they naturally thought that I had “worked the notice”—I, who would gladly have knifed the kindly critic—but, and this is why I tell the little story, not a single nasty word was said to me about it, and no one was unkind. If you knew stage folk as well as I do, that would speak volumes. There was really very little of that sort of pettiness in the Benson company, though I won't say there was not some—we were actors, not angels.

Later on they all accepted me, and made me one of themselves, and when at the end of the run of *The Tempest* in Birmingham, Mr. Benson offered me a re-engagement—“small parts and walk ons” in his forthcoming tour—I think I was as happy as any girl, either on or off the stage, could be.

CHAPTER IV

The Journey—Eleanor Aitkin—Connie Robertson—Madge McIntosh and others—Curtseys—Legs and Arms—Bun Time—Christmas Day at Cork—Floods and Heartbreak—Real Work—Rehearsals—Maria—Stage Fright—Otho Stuart and "Hamlet"—Mr. Benson's Moods—Oscar Asche—"Bubbles"—His Claudius and Antonio—His Make-up and his Water Polo—Asche as Thomas Mowbray—"Richard II."—The Production for Stratford—All Hands to the Wheel—Shakespeare and Sport—The "Specially Engaged Brigade"—The Firms—W. Graham Browne ("Wully")—O. B. Clarence ("Clarty")—"The Flea"—The Clerk of the Court.

THE tour was to open at Cork, and we crossed on Christmas Eve. It was not a nice time on which to leave the home circle, and, in spite of all my first fresh enthusiasm, I felt a little depressed. We travelled third-class, of course, but as we had specially reserved carriages, with only four or five in each, it was quite comfortable.

In the compartment to which I was allotted was old Miss Eleanor Aitkin. I wonder if you ever saw her. She is dead now, but she played at the St. James's Theatre not so very long ago. What a fine old actress she was! And such an old dear into the bargain! She had been playing Shakespearean old women for years and years, and her nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* was one of the most beautiful performances you can imagine.

I do not suppose that she really was so very old

in those days, but she seemed very old to us, and exacted a certain amount of respect, though we all called her Nellie, all the same. At one time I lived with Miss Aitkin and shared her rooms, and as she suffered from rheumatism I used to rub her shoulders and back by the hour while she told me stories about the stage in her young days, or, what I liked still better, gossiped with Frank Rodney about old times. I loved fat old Nellie.

Supper is always much the pleasantest and most satisfactory meal of the day for actors: work is over and done with, and one feels really justified in taking things easily. I remember the first time Rodney came to supper with Nellie and me, I had almost to pinch myself to prove that I was awake, and was offering beer and cold ham to such a great and distinguished actor! He had a wonderful memory, too, and used to talk about stage folk whose names I had only heard of as belonging to a bygone age. Oscar Asche always used to declare that Rodney had played with Phelps: that, of course, was chaff, but it was a pose of his to talk as if he were an old man, and twenty years of stage life is a long time.

But to return to the journey to Cork. Opposite Eleanor Aitkin in the railway carriage sat Constance Robertson—such a bonnie girl she was, with curly hair and brown eyes: she was a niece of Mrs. Kendal, and had been with the company some time. She played “seconds,” the parts after Mrs. Benson’s, or rather, I should say, she played some of them, for Madge McIntosh, who was also

in the carriage, had been engaged for "seconds" too. There was a certain amount of rivalry, therefore, between her and Connie Robertson. Madge, like myself, was a new-comer, but young as she was she had already had a good deal of experience of the stage, both with Ben Greet and Edward Terry, and had very clear ideas about the value of that experience and her position in the company. Her voice and elocution were as perfect then as they are now, and she showed certain promise of developing into the fine actress she has since become. She was a good dancer, too; she had been trained in stage dancing, which is probably why she moves so gracefully, and her stage curtseys were my envy and despair: she could go down so very low and remain down so very steadily—by no means an easy thing to do, let me tell you, one is so inclined to wobble when a curtsey has to be "held" for long. One day, however, she taught me the trick. You sank gracefully down, spreading out your full skirt as you did so; then, instead of bending the knees until they almost cracked, you slid one leg out in front and sat comfortably down on the heel of the other, until it was time to rise. This, carried out with an air, a flourish of a fan, and a graceful bend of the head, is extremely effective—when the skirt is full enough to hide the movement of the legs, and not like the skirts we have been wearing lately, in which it is impossible to make any sort of curtsey, or, as that New York parson is now complaining, "genuflection," with decency. Not that I wish for a return of the

old crinoline days, but crinolines must have had their good points. Imagine being able to move your legs about with perfect freedom inside a perambulating wire cage, or sinking down in a curtsey into billows of silk or tulle. There is a self-conscious grace about a crinoline that is very charming. Madge and I employed our faked curtsey, then, with much satisfaction, until new dresses with less voluminous skirts betrayed us, and we were requested to practise the correct obeisance until we were able to do it in the regulation manner. Quite right, too, and much better for one's muscles.

It is rather strange how little attention seems to be paid, even nowadays, to the correctness of the curtsey on the stage. A little while ago I saw a magnificently produced Elizabethan play, in which one of the principal characters invariably made a minuet curtsey. There is almost as great a diversity in the fashion of a curtsey as there is in the fashion of a costume. There is the sweeping Old Comedy curtsey—the straight-backed kind—the one in which the skirt is held up in the hands—the one made with the arms folded—and ever so many more. The last-mentioned curtsey is the Queen Anne. I remember Miss Geneviève Ward telling me that she once went through a whole play of that period without once unfolding her arms.

But I was telling you about Cork, and seem to have drifted into a lecture upon arms and legs. I hope you do not agree with a remark I read once in a delightful Victorian book, that "legs are

things not to be spoken of—and found only in the dark.”

To return. The fifth occupant of the carriage on our Christmas Eve journey was Florrie Gretton, a pretty little girl of about fifteen, who had been in the company for some years dancing and playing fairies, etc., but now she was going to take Jessie Bateman's place, for Jessie, being now a married woman, had left after *The Tempest* to join her husband.

It was very strange to me, that rush through the night with total strangers, for they had none of them, except Florrie, been at Birmingham for *The Tempest*; still stranger it seemed when we reached Holyhead, for, will it be believed? I had never been on the sea before! Never been out of England at all!

It must have been rather a rough night, for I know we all went at once downstairs and into the ladies' saloon to lie down. The stewardess brought round those horrible tin basins, and I was very indignant when she insisted upon leaving one by me. I told her “that *I* certainly was not going to be sick.”

“O' course not, me dear,” she said soothingly, “but the wee basin 'ull be taking no har-rm at all where it is, and I'll just leave it be.”

Fortunately, her precautions were needless in my case, but not so with some of the other girls! It was a horrid night.

I don't remember much about the long railways journey next day, except that Mr. Benson himself

brought us round some buns or sandwiches, or something, for as it was Christmas Day, of course all the station restaurants were closed, and as few of us had been wise enough to provide ourselves with food, we should have fared badly but for the Bensons' kindness.

Talking of buns reminds me of one Benson custom I never met with elsewhere, "Bun time." Whenever we were rehearsing, at about twelve o'clock Richmond (Mr. Benson's man) brought round a bag of buns—or the still more popular dough-nuts—and handed them to the company. These buns were supposed to be paid for out of the fines which were made for missing an entrance, laughing on the stage, etc., but as, during the whole three years that I was in the Benson company, I only heard of about three cases in which a fine was really deducted from the offender's salary, it is obvious that payment for these buns must have come from another source—namely, from Mr. Benson's pocket. This is rather a good example of his consideration for his company's feelings—we could eat the buns without having to feel grateful, or without ceasing to consider ourselves badly treated, if that happened to be our mood at the moment—the money for buns being *supposed* to come from our own pockets.

Looking back on that Christmas Day, I wonder whether a girl ever began touring who was more ignorant of the life than I was. I did not even know that it was necessary to book lodgings beforehand. I suppose I thought I should find them

ready and waiting for me, like the theatre; anyhow, I had not booked any at Cork, and when we arrived I did not know where to go, or what to do, until Madge McIntosh came to my rescue, and offered to let me share her rooms for at least that night.

That year the floods were out in Cork. I should think they were out, indeed! All the roadways and most of the side-walks were covered with water—and it was dark, and it was raining, and being Christmas Day, in a good Catholic country, there was not a single hired car or conveyance of any sort to be had at the station. After great efforts, Madge and I eventually bribed two porters to carry our bags, but they looked upon us with most disapproving eyes for travelling on such a day, and after they had gone a little distance, deposited the luggage firmly in the middle of a brook which was running down the street, and declined to go any farther; so Madge and I had to pull and haul, and shove, and paddle the wretched bags along until we got to our destination. What a Christmas Day! We were none the worse for our adventure, however (one never is when one is young!), and I went to bed, and slept soundly, until suddenly awakened in the morning by a hollow groan and a voice saying, “Oh, God! I wish I was dead!” It was Madge, sitting up in her bed with a face of the deepest misery. I thought that something dreadful must be the matter, but it was only that she had left behind in the last company some one with whom she thought she was in love, and she was sure, therefore, that her heart was

broken; though before many days had passed she began to realise that there were lots of interesting things left in the world—including other men! Dear Madge! She always did feel things intensely. The artistic temperament, I suppose. But what fun she was, and what an absolutely good sort. I have never forgotten that awful groan on waking, though, and we laugh about it together even now. What an asset it would have been for Lady Macbeth!

The next day we started rehearsals and work, and it is real work, believe me, when one has to learn a new part for nearly every night. That particular tour was quite an easy one for me, my parts—when I had them—were so short; but the next tour, when I was promoted, I had a real taste of work. Hero (*Much Ado*); Maria (*Twelfth Night*); Jessica (*The Merchant*); The Gentlewoman (*Macbeth*); and Sweet Anne Page, all in one week! besides having to fit on and arrange the dresses for the parts. You can imagine the state one's nerves get into—one's brain feels like a little gray bag (at least, mine did) and one just longs to take it out and put it away on a shelf for a rest! Rehearsals for fresh productions in the Benson company were quite good and thorough, but if one was a beginner, and had to take part in a play which had been already done, all the rehearsal one got was to be "run through" in odd corners of the theatre, by the actors immediately concerned in the scene—or the stage manager deputising for them. That was nervous work, if you like, but it was the finest training possible, all the same. It



Oscar Asche as Othello, 1895.

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was like the way in which they used to teach little boys to swim—pick them up and throw them into a pond, until they learnt how to keep themselves afloat—only, with this great difference, that in our pond the wretched beginner always found kind, practised arms waiting to catch him and pull him through, until the time when he was able, however feebly, to strike out for himself. The help given by the more experienced members of the company to beginners was remarkable, by Mrs. Benson especially so. She was one of those wonderful teachers who are born, not made—teachers who not so much tell you what to do as make you see it for yourself. It is a rare gift this; very few of the producers or managers I have been with have had it. (Granville Barker was one who had, though, in *excelsis*.) I know that the first time I played Maria (*Twelfth Night*), I gave what we call a “dire show,” and should certainly have been taken out of the part had not Mrs. Benson pleaded for one more chance for me, and made me “see” the character, so that the next time I quite forgot that it was Mr. Benson and Lyall Swete and Rodney that I was acting with—a fact that had overwhelmed me with nervousness before; they were just jolly, roystering companions, and I was their superior, being a woman, and a shrewd one at that. How I loved Maria! I think it was my favourite part, which, as probably you are sufficiently penetrating to understand, means that I fancied myself in it!

But this is going far ahead of that first week in Cork. The only speaking part I played there was

that of Margaret in *Much Ado About Nothing*, and on that occasion I had my first, and, thank goodness, only, attack of stage fright. It is a loathsome, horrible experience, real stage fright—everything goes from you, memory, power of movement, voice, everything—and the world and all that it contains becomes a blank.

Margaret has a little scene with Benedick (Mr. Benson). We played it as a front scene—that is, within a few feet of the footlights. Now I had never been on in a front scene before, and either the lights or the nearness of the audience, or, more probably, nervousness at playing with Mr. Benson, so upset me, that, instead of having a sparkling encounter of wits with Benedick, as I should have done, all I could do when I got on was to stare at him for what to me seemed an eternity and then to gasp out the interesting information:—

“ Lady Beatrice hath legs—— ”

The scene should have *ended* by Margaret’s saying:—

“ Well, I will call Beatrice to you, who I think hath legs.”

Then I turned tail and rushed off sobbing. I believe I sobbed all the rest of the play—I know I sobbed all night, for I thought my career was ended for ever (and, believe me, I spelt Career with a very big capital in those days), and a red-eyed and miserable little Margaret sneaked into

rehearsal next morning, only to find that no one had taken any notice of her dry-up and that she had not "entirely ruined the whole play" after all.

Mr. Benson could never prompt any one on the stage, he was too wrapt up in his own part, thinking, perhaps, of a new bit of business that he would introduce into it, or even of something that did not please him in the setting. Some actors, though, are wonderfully clever at covering up both their own and other people's "dry-up's." A long time before this, when Mr. Benson was very ill, his parts had to be played by the leading juvenile—Otho Stuart it was then. He got through Romeo, Petruchio, and Benedick with flying colours, but when *Hamlet* went up it was too much for him. He did not know the words (No wonder!), and he knew he did not. However, he refused to be beaten—played *Hamlet* had to be—so he put copies of the book in all the exits, and whenever he dried up, he would clutch Horatio (or the nearest convenient super) by the arm, and hiss dramatically:

"Hist! . . . Crouch we awhile and mark!"

then he would steal off into the wings and refresh his memory for his next speech. It added somewhat to the length of the play! but the audience never realised that they were not being treated to Shakespeare "as he is writ!" This, at least, is Mrs. Benson's version, and—well, it is too nice not to be true!

No one ever made Mr. Benson laugh on the

stage. (I do not imagine that any one ever tried, not even Mrs. Benson, and she was positively wicked in this way sometimes with other people.) But sometimes in the wings he would laugh with us and be quite merry; not wildly hilarious, you understand; we wore "our rue with a difference" while he was around. It all depended upon the part that he was playing. On *Merry Wives* or *Shrew* nights he would be quite gay—particularly in the latter. Petruchio was such a strong man! so athletic! he used to carry a kicking Katharine right off on one shoulder!—and on these nights we might safely sit about on dress baskets and laugh and chatter as much as we liked, so long as our voices could not be actually heard on the stage. But on *Hamlet* or *Macbeth* nights, and still more on *Othello* ones, it was not wise to go into the wings at all, it was much safer to keep out of the way in one's own dressing-room till the call came to go on. That, of course, is always the proper thing to do in all well-conducted theatres, but the proper thing is sometimes very dull!

Oscar Asche was also very much affected by the part he happened to be playing. Even in those days he was a great strong fellow, and either actor or stage-hand who was rash enough to stand in his way at entrance, or exit, when he was Claudius in *Hamlet* would find himself, very literally, sent flying. What a splendid, barbaric Claudius Asche was! And with what a wonderful make-up! Great masses of tangled red hair falling on each side of his face; a beard and a hooked nose—yes, a



H. O. Nicholson, O. B. Clarence, Oscar Asche, Harcourt Williams, Garnet Holmes, in front of
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hooked one. He really was a master of make-up, Oscar. Nowadays one has grown so used to associating him with Chinese or Eastern characters, one has almost forgotten, alas! (the word will out) how he can transform himself in other parts. Of course, there is a little more of him to transform now than there was in those days, but I want him to show us again what he can do in this way. He was just like a big romping schoolboy then—rough when it was his humour—and more than unpleasant if he got really angry, but he could be tender, too, and very kind.

As Antonio in *Twelfth Night* he was always soft, even a little sentimental, his large blue eyes would fill with tears (I insist that he had large blue eyes in that part, and a noble, high forehead, obtained by stuffing grease-rags under his wig) as he talked to one about "Home" (Australia), and how he longed to go back there and smell again the gum trees and the eucalyptus. I do not think that he was really home-sick, you know; it was a pose, it suited the character, but he was convinced he felt it at the moment. What he always intended doing—and did, in an amazingly short period of time—was to return to Australia with triumph, as a great man, bearing his laurels with him; and in his marvellously successful tour with Lily Brayton some ten years later—or less—he carried out his intention. Of course he carried out his intention! It would not have been Oscar if he had not! there is something about him, a sort of "giant steam-roller" touch which absolutely spells success.

This is not to suggest that he is not a very fine artist, and does not deserve all he has earned, but all who know him realise that wonderful quality he has of "getting there," whatever obstacle, whatever difficulty, whatever almost impossibility, may be in the path; climb them, walk over them, trample them under foot, but get there—and he does.

But now to return to the old days. As Biondello in *The Shrew* Oscar was just a round-faced boy, almost bursting with high spirits, playing practical jokes, tickling people's faces with the long feather of his cap, and enjoying every minute. Mrs. Benson's name for him was "Bubbles," and on *Shrew* nights he was always particularly "bubbly." The part in which I like best to recall him is that of Thomas Mowbray in *Richard II.* I can almost hear his voice even now saying, after the sentence of exile has been passed:—

" I am too old to fawn upon a nurse,
Too far in years to be a pupil now;
What is thy sentence then but speechless
death,
Which robs my tongue from breathing native
breath ?

Farewell, my liege. Now no way can I stray;
Save back to England, all the world's my way."

The longing and the heart-break in that "back to England" always brought tears to my eyes, however often I heard it.

Richard II. was produced for a Stratford-on-Avon Festival, and was an entirely new production. It was the first time that the Benson company had ever played it, and it was quite new to every one. What a wonderful, what a beautiful play it is! my favourite of all Shakespeare's historical plays, except perhaps *Julius Cæsar*, and Mr. Benson gave such a beautiful rendering of the part of Richard: on the first night it was almost perfect; afterwards, as so often happened, the cares and tares of management sprung up and choked it. I infinitely preferred his Richard to that of—well, as comparisons are odious, let us say to that of any other actor I have seen.

It was a really fine production, this *Richard II.* Lyall Swete, that clever artist, as well as actor, designed all the properties: the crests, the armour, the flags, and helmets; and he and his wife actually made many of them. I think we most of us worked in some small way in the production with our hands as well as acting in it, that was what made it seem so interestingly "our own." I was one of the two ladies who attend the Queen, and as they have only one scene (the exquisite garden scene), there was plenty of spare time at rehearsals in which to work, and I "adopted" Thomas Mowbray, and embroidered gorgeous red lions rampant on his surcoat and bannerette. I had quite a pretty little bit of business, too, in the Tournament scene. I used weepingly to throw him a handkerchief, as—a banished man—he left the lists. The incident is not Shakespeare—pure Benson, I think—though

it may have been traditional business, for Sir Herbert Tree used it in his production, but in any case it was one of the joys of being with Mr. Benson that he always encouraged any actor of his company, however small their position, to work up little bits of business for themselves. It made it all so much more interesting, even if only walking on, one felt one was part of the play.

The cast of *Richard II.* for that Festival was a really remarkable one:—

Richard	..	..	Mr. Benson
The Queen	..	..	Mrs. Benson
John of Gaunt	..	..	E. Lyall Swete
Duke of York	..	..	George Fitzgerald
Henry Bolingbroke	..	..	Frank Rodney
Thomas Mowbray	..	..	Oscar Asche
Bushey	..	..	C. Langley
Bagot	..	..	O. B. Clarence
Henry Percy	..	..	W. Grahame Browne
Aumerle	..	..	H. R. Hignett
1st Gardener	..	..	George Weir
Bishop of Carlisle	..	..	Oscar Asche (double)
Duchess of York	..	..	Madge McIntosh
Connie Robertson and I	the Queen's Ladies		

The dresses were all new, or re-done up, and very charming. Mine, I remember, was of soft blue velvet, with the conical headdress and softly falling veil of the period, and my hair was puffed out in pearl nets on each side of my face. Very becoming and pretty it was.

Oscar Asche was very popular with most of the men of the company. With the women? Well, to tell the truth, he did not take very much notice of us. I rather fancy that he considered women as of an inferior creation in those days—Lily Brayton had not yet joined!

"They were not good at sport, and it was sport that the Benson company existed for—after Shakespeare, of course—not dangle after women." That was his attitude.

Certainly sport was a very good second to Shakespeare with us, sometimes, even, one suspected it of being first! Rehearsals never interfered with a "match"—they were always over in time for that; and some of the small part gentlemen, what we called the "Specially engaged Brigade," hardly seemed to justify their engagement except by the fact that they were "Blues," or had "played for the County," or were something wonderful "on the Goal."

We had a cricket team, and a hockey team, and a water polo team; and we despised women went to all the matches possible, and were just as excited over the "form" of our side as the men were.

I liked the water polo best. To see Oscar in the water was a thing of joy, he seemed more buoyant than the ball itself, the other side simply could not get him under; he was very good at hockey and football, too.

There were two rival firms in the company, one consisting of Asche, H. R. Hignett, and Langley, and the other of O. B. Clarence, Stenhouse, and

W. Grahame Browne—"Wully" was Oscar's nickname for the latter, and Wully, of course, was remarkably handsome, with tightly curling golden hair and large blue eyes with long lashes; his figure, perhaps, was a little too short and squarely built for the ideal Greek god, but he was very good to look upon, all the same, and a very nice boy.

Funnily enough, he was not considered by the company in those days to show any remarkable talent as an actor, and he was given the rather dull "Charles-his-friend" type of parts—Horatio and the like—it was chiefly for his looks, and still more for his prowess at sport that he was valued. Which shows how wrong even the best judges of acting (and, of course, we thought ourselves that) may be. The last time I saw Graham Browne playing with Marie Tempest, he gave a most delicious performance—and every one knows what an admirable actor he is.

These two firms, then, were friendly rivals on all occasions: rivals for the best parts, rivals for the best lodgings, above all, rivals for the best record in the field; and each member of each trio was vowed to stick by his own firm through thick and thin.

The company had a magazine of its own then, too, called *The Flea* (I have a copy by me now), the issue of which was intermittent, but its personalities pungent, when it did appear. The secret of who was the editor was kept "wropt in mystery," but after all these years, I betray no one by saying

that I believe it to have been O. B. Clarence—"Clarty," we called him.

Clarty used to play the Clerk of the Court in *The Merchant*, and, as that character, used to write personal, and probably ribald, remarks about his fellow-actors during the whole Trial Scene, in a book which he pretended was a stage property, and carried on and off himself. That book was never seen by mortal eye—or rather by feminine mortal eye—(I suspect his firm were allowed to enjoy it), but I fancy that it would make rather amusing reading nowadays!

The time was coming, however, when, in the case of Oscar Asche and some others, the God of Sport was to be temporarily deposed by another and more powerful god, but that story, I think, merits a new chapter.

CHAPTER V

Lily Brayton Joins—The Result of Cold Mutton—Her First Part—The Whirligig of Time—"Chu Chin Chow"—Matrimonial Engagements—Touring the Smalls—Laughing on the Stage—H. R. Hignett—Waterford—Pigs, Policemen, and Priests—Irish Bulls—Stratford-on-Avon—Festival Week—George Weir—Audrey—Mrs. Benson—Ophelia—A Story—The Graveyard Scene—Mixed Odours—Alice Denvil—Henry Ainley—His First Appearance—Others of the Company—The Staff—"The Dream"—and Farewell.

THE triumph of Cupid over Sport came in due course.

A year later Oscar Asche was vanquished, and vanquished by the slimmest, shyest, most demure little miss that ever sighed for the stage.

A mere slip of a thing, with big blue eyes and golden-brown hair, and with the figure of a thin boy, so thin and flat, indeed, that one almost thought she must be consumptive. A little girl from Wigan! who had never acted in her life, and seen very little of the acting of others; but a little girl, for all that, with a determination—yes, and an inner knowledge—that not only would she eventually go on the stage, but that once there she would succeed. Her name, of course, was Lily Brayton.

The Benson company was playing for a week at Scarborough. Lily obtained an introduction to Mr. Benson, and came there from Wigan to



Lily Brayton as Rosalind.

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see him, and her charm and personal attractions were so marked that, there and then, he gave her an engagement.

I happened to be talking to Oscar on the pier, when Lily, coming out of the Pavilion after her interview with Mr. Benson, passed us; and I think—no, I am sure—that at that very moment Cupid loosed his arrow and pierced the mighty chest of the “strong man” beside me; for Oscar, who, according to his *own* account, never troubled to notice a girl at all, at once made some remark about her looks, though really he would have been a superhuman man who failed to notice anything so sweetly pretty as Lil was that day.

She joined the company a little later, for the winter tour, which again was to begin at Cork. As I knew some relations of hers, they asked me “to look after their little cousin, and if possible have her to live with me.” This, from the superior altitude of a whole year’s experience, I kindly consented to do, and we agreed to share rooms. We started living together at Cork—I engaged the rooms (beforehand this time!), not very nice rooms, to be sure, but then at that time my weekly salary was two pounds, and Lily’s was one—so we were hardly in a position to be extravagant. (Lily Brayton at a pound a week! Ye Gods!)

Our first day, a Sunday, we naturally had a “joint”—roast mutton—the next day cold ditto; the third, the same (for the landlady was disagreeable and refused to “hot it up”). Even on the fourth day that horrible leg of mutton still had

some meat on it—like the widow's cruse, it never seemed to grow less! and though poor Lily pleaded hard for something fresh, I was adamant,—

"That mutton has got to be finished up, we cannot afford to waste it," I insisted. So the worm turned at last, and issued an ultimatum: "Then," said Lily, nose in air, "then—I shall *go out with Oscar!*"

And "go out with Oscar" she did—to Blarney, on an Irish jaunting-car, with a big hamper of delicious provisions between them, leaving me to my widow's cruse and the comfort of my own economy. That was the beginning. There were many more picnics and other excursions, with the result that, in less than a fortnight of joining the company, the shy little novice whom I was patronising and "being kind to" announced that she was engaged to be married, to the man whom hitherto the feminine portion of the company had been inclined to regard as a "savage" and a "woman-hater," but also to hold in due respect for his position as a leading actor.

Lily declares that I am entirely responsible for her marriage; that I drove her into the arms of Oscar, by starvation! Well, well, I shall be glad if the recording angel has nothing worse against me!

Sometimes, even now, when Lil is rushing me in her Rolls Royce (or one of them!) up to her charming house in St. John's Wood—Chinese drawing-room, mediæval hall and staircase, all complete!—I remind her of the pound a week, and

how we used to spend hours retrimming our hats and making clothes for ourselves! (There was one garment of Lil's, I remember, a little black silk shoulder-cape, lined with green, that gave us endless trouble and expense—in pins.)

Lily was an adorable girl, and a great favourite, because of her sweetness and gentleness. Her voice, too, was as beautiful then as it is now. I can recall so well a supper-party which was given to the company at Liverpool. After supper Lily recited a poem call "Little Briar-Rose." I have not an idea what it was about: some sort of sob-stuff like G. R. Sims's "Billy's Rose," I fancy; anyway, it was the kind of sloppiness upon which, from Shakespearean heights, the company looked down with supreme contempt. We did not care much for recitation in any form—rather half-baked, we thought it—but, all the same, Lily recited so beautifully, and so sincerely, that we quite forgave the matter of the poem, and even asked for more. By the way, for some reason that supper-party was a teetotal one. It has impressed itself upon my recollection, because it is so hard to be really as bright and sparkling as is expected of you as an actress at midnight after a long performance, with only lemonade wherewith to cheer your soul.

There never was the faintest doubt about Lily's success as an actress, once she began. Her first part—she went on as an understudy—was the little Prince of Wales in *Richard III*. Tall as she was, in a black velvet suit and a flaxen wig, she looked

nevertheless a lovely boy-child, and she played the part so well that every one realised at once that she had a big future before her. Oh! "The Whirligig of Time." It is a strange thing! But Lily has never forgotten old days, whatever golden gifts Fortune may since have showered upon her.

One of the last times I went to see her was in *Chu Chin Chow*, in the Chinese dressing-room which Oscar had just then done up for her, with Chinese embroideries and old lac. As you may remember, the dresses in that play didn't amount to much—of material, of course, I mean—and Lil had just taken off hers, consisting chiefly of barbaric jewels and a magnificent headdress, and was sitting wrapped in a lovely dressing-gown, having her toes re-pinked by her dresser, when a tap came at the door, and Oscar's voice asking, "Lil, can I come in?"

"Oh! No, no, Oscar, you can't," she cried out anxiously, "I'm not dressed!"

(Now, why should a husband require so much more dressing for than the British public?)

After that we laughed and recalled old times until the "call-girl" (His Majesty's now has a "lady call-boy") had been three times to summon Lil; the third time with a very imperative rap—"Miss Brayton, *please*."

"Do you remember the Canary?" called back Lil, as she hurried from the room, followed by her maid, vainly endeavouring to keep the shawl wrapped round her charge's shoulders. (Why

the dear woman did not die of cold during those five years of "undress," I never understood, but the theatre was always kept well heated.)

Of course I remembered the Canary! Very soon after Lil and Oscar's engagement was announced, Mrs. Brayton wrote to her daughter, telling her that she (Mrs. Brayton) was sending her one of their own spring chickens, and that it should be waiting for us at Newry (the town we were going to at the end of the week.) This was, indeed, too good an opportunity to be neglected, and we decided to celebrate the engagement by a feast. Oscar should be invited to supper next Sunday, and also a young man for me. Then we came to the conclusion—after hesitation—that it really would be much gayer if yet another couple were invited, and we would have a substantial pudding, and bacon with the chick, to ensure its going round, for, as Lil said, "Mother is sure to send a nice big one."

The invitations were all gladly accepted, and we arrived at Newry on Sunday morning, to find a large hamper duly awaiting us at our lodgings. When, with delighted haste, we opened it, out came cabbage, some apples, more cabbage, and at the very bottom, in a little box all to itself, the very tiniest specimen of domestic fowl that I have ever seen. Lily declared that it was her own pet canary, plucked and sent to her by mistake. I think it may have been a *petit poussin*, but whatever it was, it was a dish that Oscar would finish in two mouthfuls. Nothing could be done. Sunday

morning in Ireland—no shops open—imagine our despair!

However, there was the bacon—with cabbage—the pudding—and the landlady managed to raise three or four boiled eggs, so I hope that our guests had enough to eat; and we made very merry over the dead canary, but it could hardly be considered a Royal Betrothal Feast!

There was a perfect epidemic of matrimony among us just at that time. Mrs. Benson complained that we were “turning into an abode of love instead of a Shakespearean company.” There *was* a good deal of romance around, naturally, and why not? Many of the married folk on the stage to-day met each other for the first time in “Benson’s.”

Besides Oscar and Lil, there were Frances Weatherall (that delightful actress and witty woman) and H. R. Hignett, Graham Browne and Madge McIntosh, Gerald Soper and Florrie Gretton, Matheson Lang and Hutin Britton, and several other victims of the epidemic. Oh, yes, I met my own fate there, too.

H. R. Hignett was always called “Hig” in the company, but Mrs. Benson’s name for him was “Pansy,” and really, with the gracefully drooping way he had of standing on the stage, he did suggest that flower. He was a great favourite; a fine sportsman as well as actor. He had done something big in that way at Oxford—stroked his College boat, I think it was. He used to look so handsome in costume: he was the Lorenzo to my Jessica in

The Merchant, and to play the "In such a night" scene with him was positively thrilling!—only he never would tell me beforehand where he was going to place the moon!

"How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank,"

you know, and he used to point out a different place for it to be sleeping on every night, so that I never could turn on Diana's orb the sentimental gaze I felt would have been appropriate.

The "Smalls" of Ireland, which we visited after Cork, were very delightful places for young lovers—the walks and excursions after rehearsal, and the long evenings sitting on dress-baskets in the wings, quite idyllic!—but touring the "Smalls" wasn't altogether so satisfactory from an acting point of view. We did a fortnight of "one night stands," going to little towns where there was no theatre, and we had to make shift with a fit-up stage in any schoolroom or hall available. You can imagine that in such places the dressing-room accommodation was of the scantiest—we dressed behind a curtain at the back of the stage, as a rule—and there was a legend that on one occasion, when Mr. Benson remonstrated indignantly with the local manager because both ladies and gentlemen had been put to dress in one room, the reply was, "Glory be! and why not, sorr! Aren't they friendly?"

Naturally, the stages themselves were also very

small and inconvenient. I got into terrible disgrace, I remember, on that first tour, for "getting giggles" as the Player Queen in *Hamlet*. The platform on which the Players had to appear was only a plank raised from the stage proper on two biscuit boxes; and when one of my feet slipped off the narrow board, I lost my balance and was precipitated on to the Player King's (Randle Ayrton) chest, when I ought to have stretched my arms heavenwards and protested:—

"Nor earth to me give food, nor heaven light,"
etc., etc.,

the result being that I couldn't speak at all for laughing, and the Queen's next line:—

"The lady protests too much, methinks,"

was spoilt, for the lady had not protested at all. It was disgraceful to spoil a *Hamlet* scene, and, naturally, Mr. Benson was angry. He sent for me at once, and I should probably have been given notice on the spot had not Mrs. Benson been in his room at the time, and said in her most sweetly-reasonable voice,—

"Don't you think, Frank, that perhaps it is just a little your own fault for bringing them to such places?"

That struck Mr. Benson as a fresh light on the subject—he was always just—so he paused to consider that new suggestion, and while he did so,

his call came for his next entrance, and by the time he was off again my crime was forgotten, and I escaped.

Do not think, please, that I am making excuses for laughing on the stage. When I am a member of the audience, nothing makes me so angry; it is discourteous, insulting, inartistic, anything you like; only somehow one's sense of humour is so abnormally developed when actually on the stage that—when one is very young, of course, I mean—it does happen.

We went to some lovely places on that tour: Newry, Killarney, Waterford, and others, and we stayed *en famille* at the most awful little inns! Waterford, though, had a proper theatre, and was very pleasant. There was a strike of some sort on there, and the R.I.C. were all kept busy conducting droves of pigs to the boats. It was at Waterford, too, that we went to a Convent School to play *The Merchant*, and the priest connected with it was so hospitable that he poured neat whisky into our glasses at lunch, assuring us that it was sherry! We drank it! It was an ice cold day, but what our performance was like afterwards, I tremble to think. I know that it required a lot of explaining to Mr. Benson, who never “drank”—sherry or anything else.

We often used to give performances at schools and convents. The children very much appreciated that way of learning Shakespeare (as they do now in the L.C.C. schools), though one dear old nun did comment doubtfully upon the necessity for so

much education. "I'm after believing that the blessed saints themselves could do no more than read and write," she urged.

We had delightful times, too, when we went to Dublin, where the Benson company was very popular, and we were fêted, and dined, and supped, with all the well-known hospitality of the place. Of course, we collected Irish bulls from the drivers of the Irish cars: they could generally be depended upon to say something witty. (No doubt they found that it paid.) Here is one.

All towns and districts in Ireland, in the north of it especially, have their own bands, and there is much rivalry between the various neighbourhoods. One night in the shebeen, after a day of local sports, a fiery little man from a suburb of Belfast "took the floor," calling out:—

"Hu sthruck th' drummer ov th' Cromlin bond?"

Getting no answer, he almost danced with fury, and repeated more threateningly than ever his query:—

"Hu sthruck th' drummer ov th' Cromlin bond?"

At last with a roar came the reply from a young giant at the back:—

"*I* sthruck th' drummer ov th' Cromlin bond."

"Ay, mon dear, but ye struck him a queer clout," said the wee fiery one, subsiding quietly.

Just one more north of Ireland story. (I begin to feel a little like Miss Helen Mar!)

Portadown is a small sort of black country town,

and a third-class railway passenger returning there was constantly heard to mutter during the journey, "To hell with the Pope! To hell with the Pope." At last a fellow-passenger, out of curiosity, inquired what his Holiness had done.

"Och, I've naething agen the mon miself," was the reply. "I know naught about him, but he's got a damned bad name in Portadown."

Nowadays one thinks of Ireland as more tragic than humorous, but the wit is there still. The last time I was over, I said to an Irishman something about the great difficulty of reconciling religious differences.

"Religious differences?" he replied; "sure, there aren't any; it's just those damned Protestants making all the bother!"

After Ireland we visited towns in the north of England. Leeds, Hull, Bradford, and the like—horrid places, from a touring actor's point of view. Dirty lodgings, full of "inhabitants," human and other, dirty theatres, and cold, critical audiences. We hated them (though the business was good enough), but always after those northern towns, came April, with Shakespeare's birthday and Stratford-on-Avon—the very name is music. When the time came to go there we used to travel on a Saturday night from, say Bradford, with its blackness and winter, and wake up the next morning in the spring and freshness of Warwickshire. Stratford week was a real festival week for us. We girls always saved our spring frocks to wear on the first day there (weather permitting),

and white dresses and shoes, and flannels for the men, were considered the "only wear." Believe me, what with sitting on the banks of the river during waits at rehearsals, river picnics directly rehearsals were over, the hospitality of the Stratfordians, the enthusiastic and packed audiences—and oh! the never-to-be-forgotten bush of rosemary outside the stage door—we had a gorgeous time. I should like to dwell on Stratford and the happy days there, but I want to tell you about a few more Bensonians before I leave them altogether.

The first place must be given to George Weir, that ripe Shakespearean comedian. I never saw a better actor in his own special parts. Uneducated, self-taught, acting by instinct only, and getting right every time—that was George Weir. Once I asked him to tell me why he did something (some special little bit of business, as Falstaff in *Henry IV.*), which seemed to me extraordinarily subtle. "I'm sure I don't know, my dear," he said, "it just comes that way." He never thought it out, probably he did not fully realise all that it meant. It "came that way"—and it was *right*.

Old George was very kind to me. I played "opposite" to him—as we call it—in a good many plays: Maria, Constance, in *She Stoops to Conquer*, Audrey, and the rest, and so used to go before the curtain with him for the calls; and old George, who was a great favourite, always had many calls. Of course, the applause was really for him, but I was free to think that a tiny bit of it was meant for

me if I liked—and I did like! I really believe that there is nothing so deliriously intoxicating in the world as the applause of an audience!

George Weir specially liked me as Audrey (*As You Like It*), and I loved myself in it! or perhaps I should say that I loved playing it—(though there is a good deal of truth in my first statement!) I wore an old potato-sack with a hole for my head to go through, a rope round my waist, big wooden clogs stuffed with straw to make them stick on, a straw hat without a crown, and my hair all towzled and hanging round my shoulders: but—please observe the subtle feminine touch (Audrey was a very primitive woman)—a red poppy was stuck into the tangles. Also, I always had a big raw turnip to munch—I did munch it, too—and my arms and face were all brown and dirty. Truly might I say:—

“I am not fair, therefore I pray the gods make me honest.”

I first played Audrey during that first Cork season; no one could possibly help entering into a part in a get-up like that, and I made the first little hit of my stage life in it. Mr. Benson himself and some of the company standing in the wings laughed at me munching my turnip, and dancing—save the mark!—round with Weir, and they said kind things to me afterwards; I was even sent on to take a call, all to myself.

My goodness! how absurdly happy I was that night! I felt absolutely confident that I should

become a great and world-famous actress, and all because—with youth and high spirits to help me—I had managed to acquit myself decently in a small character part! Poor, silly little thing that I was, thinking that the world was mine to play with, like a red and golden cowslip ball! If only I had known what life held—indeed, if any of us knew that:—

“ God ha’ mercy on his soul!
And of all Christian souls.—God b’ wi’ ye.

Which reminds me that I am not supposed to be writing an essay on Fate, but an account of the Benson company. Those lines were Ophelia’s last in the mad scene in *Hamlet*, and as Mrs. Benson said them they were absolutely haunting. I used to watch the scene from the wings, and then go round to the back to talk to her as she lay on the bier, with flowers and water-weeds clinging to her, ready to be carried on the stage at the end of the act. It was rather gruesome to see her lying like that. At one time she was even carried on in the burial scene, but a wooden coffin was substituted later, for fear of accidents. I have heard Mr. Benson tell a story of how, on one occasion, no property coffin being available, a grandfather’s clock, covered with a pall, was brought on instead, and in the middle of Hamlet’s speech started striking. He told this story in a brilliant after-dinner speech, and Mrs. Benson wickedly whispered to me,—

“ Yes, the same thing happened to Macready! ”

So I am not going to vouch for the absolute

truth of the story, but I really do remember that that "maimed rites" scene always seemed to invite mishaps. One night the part of the "churlish priest" was being played by a very young and very nervous actor, called Whitworth Jones, who, when he got as far as—

"Her obsequies have been as far enlarged
As we have warranty: her death was doubtful,"

dried up completely; he couldn't take the prompt, lost his head, and went on repeating, "Her death—her death was—her death—her death——" until the King (Oscar Asche) swept him off the stage with a magnificent gesture of his cloak and a muttered "Get off, you b——y fool." Bad language was, of course, absolutely forbidden. Mr. Benson was very strict on the point, but this time he "happened" not to hear. I fancy that really he was glad to have the words said for him.

Certainly it is a difficult scene—that of Ophelia's burial; it is not easy to dig a grave in the boards of the stage altogether convincingly, even though, as old George Weir did, the grave-digger has a pile of real earth to play about with. He was a splendid "gravedigger," George Weir. So here at last I am back to where I started from, which was telling you about that fine old Mummer, and how I appreciated and enjoyed acting with him. There was just one tiny drawback, though, to my pleasure. Perhaps baths were scarce at the Inns he generally stayed at: he was distinctly fat, and

used to get very hot! Also he liked onions for dinner, and a glass—*or two*—of beer during the evening, the effect being—well, powerful! All the same, he was a dear old thing, very kind to me, and oh! what a delightful actor!

Another of the same fine old school was Alice Denvil. She came after Miss Aitkin left, and was positively unique—the most typical old “Pro” I have ever met. She had been on the stage since babyhood, and had had a very hard time, and so she regarded us modern Mummerys, and our ideas of work, with supreme contempt. She addressed every one indiscriminately as “Duckey”—rumour had it that she once had to attend in the police courts (as a witness, of course), and insisted upon applying the same term of endearment to both magistrate and policemen. She had green hair, too—really and truly green; for “Inecto” was not invented then, and hair dyes, particularly cheap ones, could not be trusted to do their colourings properly, and she wore a bonnet covered with bugles, and some species of rat round her neck summer and winter, which she always spoke of as “me furs.” She grumbled, too—how she grumbled! She grumbled at rehearsal—her rheumatism was always so bad! She grumbled in the dressing-room and on railways journeys. Whatever one did for her (and no one but herself ever knew how much Mrs. Benson did) she grumbled; but her grumbles were so funny, and she was such a joy on the stage that no one minded much.

On one occasion when the boredom of a long Sunday railway journey had rendered her more than usually loquacious, she told me of the conjugal tragedies she had been through with a now—happily—defunct husband.

“And he *would* turn his face to the wall, ducky; my life was a perfect Gethsemane!”

After all, she had something to grumble about; the lot of a woman on the stage who is getting old, and has to tour the provinces still, cannot be a very happy one; the glamour must have worn off by that time, and the spectre of an old age of poverty be drawing unpleasantly near. It is all very well to talk about actors being extravagant, and saying they ought to save! No doubt they ought, but it takes a lot of saving to collect enough to retire on comfortably. Miss Denvil always said that she hated the stage. “If I could earn as much sweeping a crossing, ducky, as I can on the stage, I’d leave it to-morrow,” she used to say. Her idea of happiness was to keep a bonnet-shop, she assured us. All the same, she would have been miserable if she *had* left it, and she died in harness at last.

Of the actors who joined the company while I was in it, the first to be recalled is Henry Ainley. He came to us from somewhere in Yorkshire—Leeds, I think—very young, very shy, and, I had almost said, very ignorant. Ignorant of stage life I mean. He had—and has now, for that matter—just the sweetest nature possible. He would help any one, and do anything he was asked. He would hear us our parts, he would book our

lodgings in advance, he would help us to carry our bags; he was beautiful as the morning, and—Mr. Benson gave him the book to hold! in other words, made him Prompter! How it was that F. R. B. took so long to see the boy's possibilities puzzled us all. He must have been very busy, or something, just then—for he was generally so quick to detect promise—but there it was! and Harry had been in the company some months before he got his chance even to go on as an understudy. The play in which he did at last make his appearance was *As You Like It*. We did not know beforehand that there was to be a change in the cast, and I shall never forget the sensation that passed over the stage—over the audience, too, I should think—when, in the last scene, a Greek god, with the voice of an archangel, knelt at the Duke's feet and announced that he was "the second son of old Sir Roland." After that, there was no further hesitation. Harry was given every possible part, until Sir George Alexander lured him away for the exquisite production of *Paolo and Francesca* at the St. James's, and what a Paola he made!

I cannot leave the company without mentioning the Staff. Sam Needham, the stage carpenter; Smith, the property man; Ma Melbourne—all such characters. "Ma" was the most perfect specimen of what a wardrobe-mistress should be that you can imagine: plump, middle-aged and—clean! Dress, face, cuffs, apron, all of an almost incredible cleanness! She was a martinet, too—(woe betide the unfortunate "extra lady" who

let her skirts drag in the wings, when Ma was around!—in fact, she bossed every one, except Oscar Asche. She simply adored Oscar. "My Mr. Asche," as she called him, and certainly he was a fine figure on which to display her wardrobe! Richmond—Mr. Benson's own man (he is still with Sir Frank)—was another "exactly right" specimen; always respectful to the company, in spite of being so "near the management," we always consulted him before trying to see Mr. Benson to ask for a special part, or a rise in salary! Richmond's "I shouldn't advise you to see Mr. Benson to-night, Miss Smith," or "I think you might see Mr. Benson after the second act; I will try to arrange it for you," were hints that we never ignored.

The last time I played in the dear old company was in a London production of *The Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Lyceum, on the opening night of which I remember distinguishing myself by putting on my wedding dress hind before. I had such a quick change to make and so many steps to run up to get to my dressing-room, I had no time to look in the glass before going on, so magnificently headed the Wedding Procession to Mendelssohn's music, kicking my train before me as I went!

It had a wonderful cast *The Dream* that time. Besides the old favourites, Mr. and Mrs. Benson, Rodney Weir, Asche, Lyall Swete, Alfred Brydone, there were Lily Brayton as Helena, Isidora Duncan as the first fairy, Arthur Whitby, Leslie Faber, Harry Ainley, Nancy Price, Julian

l'Estrange, and (I think) Matheson Lang, in other parts. H. O. Nicholson, too. He played Starveling (for the first time, I fancy), and both stage and audience rocked with laughter when the little shrivelled man piped out in a squeaky voice, "This lan-thorn doth the hornèd me-un present." I can't write it—if you have not heard him say it, you won't think it funny.

Oh! dear—the old days! I feel sad now at the mere ceasing to write about them; to leave them in reality—as I soon did—was a real sorrow.



Henry Ainley as Orlando.

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CHAPTER VI

"*My Friend the Prince*"—Miriam Clements—Jimmie Welch—Audacity—Rehearsal "on appro"—The Guv'nor—Grace Palotta—and High Life—A Tour-de-luxe—Motor-Cars—Touring—Theatrical Lodgings—Landladies and Visitors' Books—"As you don't like it"—"Smithy"—Venus—Mrs. Ripinton—"What's in a name"—An Air Raid—Convents.

AT that time a very charming play was on at the Garrick Theatre called *My Friend the Prince*. The author was Justin Huntly Macarthy. George Edwardes was running it, and it was one of his few ventures outside of musical comedy and burlesque.

It had a very fine cast. I cannot now remember all their names, but I know they included a delightful French actress, and also Jimmie Welch, Paul Arthur, Sybil Carlisle, and that beautiful woman, Miriam Clements. She really was lovely, tall and stately, with waving hair smoothly parted in the centre, and such a perfect complexion that she did not need (or indeed use) "make-up" on the stage. She is one of the very few actresses I have ever met who could really do without make-up, and its absence gave her a look of distinction and well-bredness which was very attractive. It is pretty safe to say that, as a rule, the less the make-up the better the expression. Miss Clements was the most independent girl I ever met on the stage; she did exactly what she liked in the matter of

turning up at the theatre or no, but then, she was not obliged to earn her living by acting, which makes all the difference.

Jimmie Welch, of course, was a brilliantly clever actor. I met him again some years later, and played in the same play with him at the Criterion. In one scene of that play I was supposed to faint, and he, as my husband, had to carry me off. I shall never forget his face when it came to this point at rehearsal, for I was tall, and quite well developed, and he, of course, was tiny. He tried to lift me from the floor, but it was so obviously impossible for him to do it without killing himself, that to avoid the death of one, or both of us from his falling down with me on top of him, I suggested that I did not mind if he dragged me off the stage backwards. I did mind, really; it was not dignified, and I used to get black and blue from the bumps I sometimes got against the door-posts, but he was delighted with the business he got out of the scene; it used to go with roars of laughter—I need not say that the play was a farce.

Poor Jimmie Welch, he was so witty and amusing, but his life was tragic, for he suffered terribly from bad health, and even then he had only half a lung—and he knew it, too. He was a tiny, pale, plain little man, but with a strange attraction for women; not that looks have really much to do with sex attraction; I fancy it is something deeper than that.

After leaving the Benson company, I went to a matinée of this same *My Friend the Prince*, and so

set my affection upon playing the Princess in it, that I dashed off at once to George Edwardes's office in Wellington Street (the Gaiety offices were there then; it was, of course, in the days of the old Gaiety) and demanded to see the manager who was taking the play on tour. Audacity favoured me again on this occasion, for I was actually admitted into the presence of Edward Sass, the aforesaid manager, and I assured him so firmly that I knew I could play the part, that my self-confidence must have carried conviction, for I actually got it—or rather, I got permission to rehearse it on approval, and play it once before “the Guv'nor”—the great George—to judge if he considered me good enough for the part.

It is always an unpleasant ordeal rehearsing on approval, so much depends upon it that one is generally too nervous to do oneself justice, added to which, in my case, I had to play with the original company, who, though no doubt they were the nearest thing possible on earth to angels, naturally found it tiresome to risk being upset by having to play with “a beginner on appro.”

Still, I was given every chance. Mr. Dion Boucicault, who was then the stage director at the Garrick, was kind enough to rehearse me himself, and I must have got through it all right, for when it was over the stage manager patted me on the back and said, “The Guv'nor is pleased with you, dear.” He said it in much the same tone that he might have announced that the king was about to confer on me an O.B.E. (only in those days

there was neither king nor Order of the British Empire, but Queen Victoria on the throne, and theatrical knights and dames less plentiful than they are now), and I have no doubt that I was duly thrilled and awestruck by the announcement.

The touring company of *My Friend the Prince* was a very picked and aristocratic company, indeed! Grace Palotta, a Gaiety star, played the lead. She had made quite a success at the Gaiety with a song called "Soldiers in the Park," and was a bonnie, jolly girl—Australian, I think. I wonder what has happened to her now! There were also pretty Lucy Bertram and Harry Sandford, and several others, whose names may now be found in *Who's Who*, or the *Court Guide*.

Edward Sass (George Edwardes's brother-in-law) was the manager, and a very kind and delightful man he was: the nearest approach I have ever met with to the immortal Captain Reece, "Commander of the Mantelpiece," of *Bab Ballad* fame, who—

"Did all that lay within him to . . .
Promote the comfort of his crew."

It was veritably an *engagement de luxe*, and it was the only time in all my stage experience that I was offered a larger salary than I asked! Not that I was in the habit of asking such large salaries—contrariwise—but, naturally, managers usually offer a little less than one asks, to be able to make a favour of agreeing to one's figure in the end (if they do agree). On this occasion, however, when

I stated the salary I wanted the reply was, "We shall give you . . . (two pounds more than I asked for) . . . the part is worth it." This sounds unbelievable, but it is true; I do not know on what principle the salary list was made up!

We had every luxury for the whole tour; and on the first night all the ladies were given bouquets, and our dressing-rooms were newly done up. We travelled not only first-class, but in saloons. The amount of luggage that we were allowed was unlimited: even our bicycles were travelled for us (it was in the latter days of the bicycling craze), and looked after and cleaned by the property man, and I verily believe had we possessed motor-cars, as some actresses do nowadays, arrangements would have been made for travelling them also.

That reminds me of a rather amusing conversation which a friend of mine told me that he overheard at the last Olympic Motor Show. An American was examining the Ford cars, while the car agent hovered round, scenting a customer; at last the fish seemed hooked, for he turned to the agent and said,—

Customer : You're the biggest cyar builders in the world, aren't you? Say now, could you build a cyar for me in a week?

Agent : Certainly we can, sir. Shall I book your order?

Customer : Well, now, could you build me one in a day?

Agent : Yes, sir, if it's necessary, I'll have that put through for you.

Customer : Ah! But say, could you build me one in twenty minutes?

Agent : Twenty minutes! Oh, come, sir, give us a chance. I don't think we could undertake to do it quite so quickly.

Customer : Well! You can, for you've done it—and—I've got the cyar——!

Needless to say, then, it was a very pleasant tour for the company, that of *My Friend the Prince*, whether it was equally pleasant to the pocket of George Edwardes (or whoever financed it) at the end, "I hae ma douts," but, no doubt, they could afford it.

Looking back, I think that touring in the provinces must have been most unpleasant, but in those days I enjoyed it well enough. It was a queer sort of life. One got up as late as possible, only just in time for rehearsal (if there was one), perhaps took a little walk after it, then back to one's lodgings for dinner at three or four o'clock; generally slept till tea—just before going to the theatre—where one was due about seven o'clock. After the theatre, supper, a little reading, talking, or relaxation of some sort, and then bed. The days really did not amount to much more than that, though they were not all quite so lazy; but I missed the sport and outdoor life of the Benson company very much.

Sometimes, of course, we made excursions to show places, and in this way we got to see a good deal more of our country than many people do, and I met many quaint characters.

One of the actors in the company told me once that he had been that morning seeing an old church (it was at Norwich), and that a funny, little, dried-up looking woman was busying herself about, but did not offer to show him anything.

"Excuse me," he said, "are you the pew opener?"

"Well, sir," she replied, "the late vicar, 'e used to call me that, but the present incumbance 'e calls me the virgin."

Now, I did *not* hear that story myself, so give it for what it's worth, but the young actor assured me that it was genuinely true! He told stories very well, though!

Only the really big touring stars stayed at hotels in those days, all the rest of us lived in rooms—theatrical lodgings, of course—ordinary lodgings would seldom accept theatrical people. The fact that our hours were so inconvenient, so unlike the hours of other folk, I suppose, was the reason why we were not accepted. It can hardly have been because of the old prejudice against actors, for even by my time the stage had become respectable, and the old story stale, which told how a certain landlady, on being asked her terms, replied, "Fifteen shillings a week for husband and wife, but a pound for the usual theatrical arrangement." Fifteen shillings for two bedrooms and a sitting-room was considered by us to be quite a good price to give, more was a little extravagant, except in the very largest towns, where prices ran higher. So, when two girls shared rooms (and we generally

did), about 30s. to £2 a week covered our board and lodging. Food was generally quite decently cooked, too (though running, perhaps, with unnecessary frequency to chops and steaks), and with care in the selection of them the rooms themselves could usually be relied on to be fairly clean. Baths were certainly a weak spot; they were such convenient receptacles in which to keep coal or the dirty linen of the household! and, therefore, not tempting to get into, even when cleared of their customary contents, but only on one or two occasions in my experience were the lodgings so unendurably dirty that I had to forfeit my week's money (one engaged rooms beforehand for the week) and depart—poorer in pocket, but richer in live stock! All the same, one needed to be young and enthusiastic to really appreciate that life. Theatrical rooms and theatrical landladies are a class to themselves; my chief recollections of the former are oil-cloth, palm-leaf fans (much decorated with wool), saddle-bag chairs, and endless photographs of stage celebrities (mostly on the Halls) inscribed "To dear Ma," and signed "Billy," or "Lily," or "Tiny Tots," as the case might be, but all dedicated to "Ma." (Wardrobe mistresses and landladies are always called "Ma" by a certain class of actors. It is a most extraordinary thing; I wonder why they do it?)

The Visitors' Book of the lodging-house made amusing reading, sometimes, though there was a somewhat pitiful sameness about most of the comments. "A Home from Home," of course,

was the most frequent, or "Have been most comfortable, and hope to return," from a rather higher class of lodger. The only really clever thing I ever heard of (and I believe that that brilliant satirist, Brookfield, was the author) was just "Quoth the Raven," written in the book of a particularly bad and dirty lodging. This story is a very well-known one.

A less told story is that of the two Chorus Ladies, who, having entertained their gentlemen friends to supper until the early hours of the morning, were visited at breakfast by a sternly indignant landlady, with a—

"I would have you to understand, young ladies, that my house is not a Bovril!"

Of course, there is the theatrical expression, "giving her the haddock," which is supposed to have arisen from a custom of nailing a dried haddock underneath the flap of the dining table when leaving—if the landlady had been particularly obnoxious—but I certainly never found the "custom" practised myself.

And my chief remembrance of theatrical landladies is of a kindly, hard-working, motherly sort of woman; you "kept in her good books," and she did her best for you, and "knew a lady when she saw one." She also knew a good deal about acting, and her criticisms were by no means to be despised, for she went pretty regularly every week to the theatre on passes supplied by her lodgers, and she very often had a son or a daughter of her own "on the boards." One landlady at Bradford told me,

I remember, that her boy was in a lovely drama called "Don't worry Mother—Suck your Orange," which was a great success. It must have been with such a title! I should love to have seen it.

When I was still with the Benson company, we were giving a matinée of *As You Like It*, and I told my landlady that, therefore, I should not be back to dinner. She said she "was going to the theatre herself, and what was the play to be?"

"*As You Like It*," I told her, "didn't you see the bills?"

"So that's the name of the *play*, is it?" she asked discontentedly. "I thought we was to have what we liked."

Theatre dressers, too, furnish endless stories. I have a great respect for them as a class, they are a fine, hard-working lot of women, and I had a quite perfect specimen of the species when I was at Daly's Theatre later on. Her name was Mrs. Smith—"Smithy," we used to call her—and she was so perfect that she deserves to be immortalised.

She had been a Ladies' Cloak Room attendant at the old Empire, in the Promenade, above all! and yet she was the most respectable and respectful dresser I have ever had, and in spite of the fact that her knowledge of life was, no doubt, extensive, she never uttered a risky word while with me, though I fancy that she could be "all things to all women" when she chose (with possibly a slightly sympathetic leaning towards the—let us say—gray ones). Even with chorus ladies (and she had "dressed" in the chorus room at one time) she

knew her place, she knew her duty to "her ladies," *and* her duty to the management; no missing entrances; no going on in outdoor shoes, so as to get home quicker; no alteration of costume was permitted in Smithy's room; by a mixture of always respectful firmness (the iron hand beneath the velvet glove), and coaxing, she managed to keep those difficult girls in order. She should surely have been a party leader.

Of course, one could not expect to find paragons like Smithy in the provinces. Provincial dressers (when one was fortunate enough to get one), were a much rougher article.

We were doing a week at Eastbourne once, and opening with *The Merchant of Venice*. The dresser came into the room where all the ladies of the company were dressing, stared deliberately from one to another, and said, "And which of you ladies may be Venus?"

"Venus?" we asked.

"To be sure, this is "The Merchant of Venus," ain't it?" she said.

"No, no, not Venus—Venice—a town, you know."

"Oh, not Venus! Now, I call that a pity; we 'ad a Venus 'ere, a week or two ago. She sat all night in a cockle shell. It took lovely."

Of course, according to most plays and many novels, the char-lady is a constant source of joy and amusement (to every one but her employer, I fancy), but I really did once meet a typical stage-cleaner. Her name was Mrs. Ripinton, and she

really did wear the black skirt, red blouse, and crêpe bonnet of tradition. She was not a widow, either, to excuse the bonnet, for her husband was one of the stage hands. One day we heard that Mr. Ripinton had done a bolt—left both theatre and home—with another woman. We felt for poor Mrs. Ripinton, and though, of course, we said nothing on such a delicate subject, a few extra tips when we passed her on stairs or passages gave mute evidence of our sympathy. Towards the end of the week I was in my dressing-room, and heard the following conversation outside between the forsaken one and a sister-char. Said the latter:—

“Well, if it was me, I wouldn’t stand it, that I wouldn’t—steal me ’usband, indeed! Wy, I’d a gone to the very ’ouse.”

“And that,” said Mrs. Ripinton solemnly, “is what I did. I went to the ’ouse, and I rang the bell, and she comes to the door ’erself, opened it ’erself she did as bold as brass. ‘Is Mrs. Ripinton at ’ome,’ I said, as I might be speaking to you now. ‘Is Mrs. Ripinton at ’ome?’”

“‘I’m Mrs. Ripinton,’ she says, and she went all colours like.

“‘Ho! you’re Mrs. Ripinton,’ I says, just like that, I says, not a bit louder, ‘You’re Mrs. Ripinton, are you? Then—’oo—the—’ell—am—I?’”

That settled the matter, evidently, for the char-ladies went about their work.

Another tour, I remember, was in *Lady Huntworth’s Experiment*, in which I was “starred” (a

pleasant experience), a delightful part, that of the masquerading cook, and I thoroughly enjoyed playing her. After that tour was finished I returned to London, drawn there by the magnetic attraction of a mere man—the “man whom I was engaged to marry! What a long description for a single thing!

It is really very difficult nowadays for girls of—shall we call them the professional classes—to know what word to use when speaking of their prospective husbands. There seems to be no name left for the article. Domestic servants, I know, always allude to their “gentlemen friends,” or “the young gentleman” they are walking out with. Shop ladies, I understand, invariably talk of “my fiancé.” Princess Mary, of course, or the Hon. Cynthia ——— can say “Lord Lascelles,” or “Lord something else,” or “Claude,” or “Harry,” as the case may be, in the full assurance that every one knows the relation in which he stands to them; but what are the girls in between to say? Mr. Tame or Mr. Wild conveys nothing. “My young man” is perhaps just a little suggestive of a music-hall. What is it to be? Can we not revive the beautiful old word “Beau,” or, better still, “Betrothed,” without sounding pedantic? Really something will have to be done about it!

There is a very great deal in a name, Shakespeare notwithstanding. A servant of mine married a short while ago, and as she was a nice girl I went to see her in her new home. It was a most superior flat: one of those delightful workmen’s dwellings

off Gilbert Street, Mayfair, that I have always longed to possess, and it was nicely furnished with bright cretonne, a reproduction of a picture by Luke Fildes, an aspidistra, and a gramophone—all complete. I was pleased to see these signs of prosperity, and said, "What is your husband, Agnes? A plumber, isn't he?"

"Oh, no," she said, "not now, ma'am. He gave that up; now he's an 'Asker' in Bond Street."

"A what?" I queried.

"An 'Asker,' ma'am; one of the unemployed that hold the boxes——"

We all agree that nowadays servants are one of the many difficulties of existence, still, I have managed to get a fair amount of amusement out of mine now and again.

During the Air Raids time, I had come home one night, dead tired after a long day's work at the hospital, and gone straight to bed. I had hardly been asleep a minute, it seemed, before "Bang, Bang!" those horrible maroons gave warning. Thinking that a little Irish maid, who had just come to me, would probably be frightened, I got up and went into her bedroom.

"Don't be frightened, Mary," I said, in the most casual tone I could manage, "there is an air raid on."

"Well, now, and isn't it too bad of them, and you so tired, too," was all she said. (The Huns really were inconsiderate at times!)

Another time I had the greatest difficulty in

persuading her that the king did not own all the money in the British Isles.

"Then what does he have his head on it for, madam, if it doesn't belong to him?" was her argument.

You see, she was a convent educated girl—it is an excellent domestic education, but perhaps a little narrowing. I know that in my time they would not let any girl take a bath "as she was," she had to wear a chemise all the time. The sight of her own bare self would have been considered terribly immodest, if not immoral.

"Now, what has all this to do with stage playing?" you ask.

My reply is, "Nothing whatever!" Which seems conclusive.

CHAPTER VII

I enter into Strange Waters—Daly's Social Ladder—Musical Comedy—Minor Principals—Stage Doors—Coventry—False Deductions—Huntly Wright—Owen Hall—George Edwardes—Tact—and the Producer—I am given my notice—An Interview—and its results—Stars—Hayden Coffin—Letty Lind—Marie Tempest—Trousers—Florence Collingbourne—More Musical Comedy—Evie Greene—Kitty Gordon—The Three Feathers.

WHEN our *tour de luxe* came to an end I had, of course, again to look for an engagement, and as, for a special personal reason, I wished to stay in London just then, and as the great George Edwardes had condescended to be "pleased with me," it seemed that the obvious course was to go and see him, and ask him to re-engage me. This I did, and—quite against the advice and wishes of my friends—signed a contract with him for a new musical comedy which he was about to produce at Daly's Theatre.

It was one of the series of plays written by "Owen Hall" (Jimmie Davis), the music of which was composed by Sydney Jones, and as none of these plays ever ran for less than a year, the engagement promised to fulfil my desire for a more or less permanent home in London.

Revue had not then been invented, I fancy, or at least had not become popular, so musical comedy was in its palmy days, and of all the musical comedy



The "Stage Cat" in *Zaza*.

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theatres, Daly's was considered the first, the most artistic and most respectable. All the same, the life there was a different one to any to which I had hitherto been used, and had its own very marked characteristics. It was such a new, strange world to me, that probably my friends were right in urging me not to join it, especially as my singing voice was of the smallest, and they were naturally sure that the engagement would lead to nothing better; but it was an amusing experience, all the same, after the first, and I enjoyed it.

The different rungs of the social ladder in musical comedy were very clearly defined indeed, but until you realised that, you were somewhat puzzled. The bottom one was the chorus gentleman—he was obviously useful, nay, even indispensable—but he was very little considered by the management, and his dressing-room used always to be under the stage, or on the very top floor. The position of the dressing-room is a sure mark of the position of the actor or actress in the theatre world, and all stage folk are very particular on this point.

The next rung of the ladder was the chorus lady proper (quite proper). These two rungs were really the backbone of the play; they did the hard work; they had the good voices, and were mostly well-trained artists.

The rung above the chorus lady proper was, of course, the chorus lady—no, no, I mean the “first row” chorus—the beauties; and from these were recruited (as merit or favour might dictate) the

still higher rung: the Minor Principals. You will please notice here a subtle distinction between Daly's and all other musical comedy theatres, which proves what I said at the beginning, that we were the most respectable. *We* had no "Show Girls" (we left that to the Gaiety and such places), ours were Minor Principals—a very different thing—for they were all "real actresses," and always had a few lines to speak, or a quartette or sextette to join in.

There were two very beautiful and genuine specimens of the species Minor Principal in the theatre at that time; their names were quite well known and they were very attractive. The *chères amies* of wealthy men, neither of them had the tiniest talent for the stage, and why they should have chosen to submit to the (to them) very slight amount of discipline entailed by being there at all, puzzled me; but they did; and in spite of the pearls of their "ropes"—each pearl probably being worth more than a month's salary—and their motor-cars, they were really quite amiable, well-behaved girls; simple seeming, too, and not "puffed up" by their good fortune!

Another advantage that Daly's Theatre possessed was, that it was possible for the ladies of the company to arrive there by whatever mode of transit their inclinations—or purses—might dictate. This may sound somewhat cryptic, but, as a matter of fact, for a girl to be seen arriving at the stage-door of the Gaiety, except in a cab, was a proceeding not at all approved of by George Edwardes,

and no girl who valued the continuance of her engagement would dare do it. I fancy G. E. considered that arrival on foot was a bad advertisement of the lady's wage-earning capacity.

At Daly's Theatre, however, this unwritten law was not in force; besides—and therein lay the theatre's particular advantage—the stage-door was up an alley, and therefore any one seeing your arrival might imagine that you had just left car or cab in Leicester Square.

This was a great convenience to our pockets, and—provided that we were never, never seen carrying an umbrella—all was well! (This contempt for umbrellas, of course, was long before the Highest in the land, or rather, the daughter of the Highest, had decided that an umbrella, at all times, is an indispensable adjunct to the toilet.)

To return to my engagement. I belonged to no rung of the ladder, was "neither fish, flesh, fowl, nor good red herring," for in this particular musical comedy there happened to be what was called a "straight" part which required acting (hem!), but no singing, and for this part I was engaged.

At the beginning I found the rehearsals anything but pleasant. I was an outsider, and was made to realise the fact. Beyond a frigid "Good-morning," or "Thank you," in reply to an overture of friendliness on my part, no one spoke to me. It was quite horrid sitting there hour after hour in a state of "coventry," and I could not make out the reason, and was miserable about it. Less innocent,

perhaps, nowadays—less ignorant, certainly—I can now easily understand the boycott, and the reasoning which led to it. The argument went this way:—

“The Guv’nor had driven me to the first rehearsal in his own hansom.” That was a fact. Obviously, therefore, I must be his latest favourite.

Ergo (if you belonged to the white, white sheep) “you did not care to speak to people of that sort.”

Equally ergo (if you belonged to the little black ones). “I was an outsider, not chosen from their own ranks; therefore, a practical or potential poacher, and ought to be discouraged by every means available.”

And all the little sheep, of whichever hue, joined in the Baa-a-a of “And whatever he can see in her, I don’t know.”

This, as I learnt afterwards, was the reason for the coldness with which I was received, but I was too innocent to guess it then; it had not struck me as in the least remarkable that an elderly gentleman (poor G. E., if he had known!) should be kind enough to give me a lift. Elderly gentlemen generally were kind to me in those days.

However, in a few weeks the company discovered their mistake, that they were crediting me with a conquest to which I could lay no claim, and, also, that I was far too interested in frying my own fish (matrimonial ones, too!) to have the faintest inclination to interfere with any culinary efforts on their part, so all was well.



Huntley Wright in *The Greek Slave*, 1898.

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The real principals—the Stars—never mixed much with others at rehearsals. They used to remain in their own dressing-rooms, except when actually on the stage, but Huntly Wright was in the cast, and from the very beginning he was kind and friendly, and as delightfully amusing off the stage as on it.

It is always considered “the thing” in musical plays when one is “on” in a scene with the leading comedian, to “dry up” and be unable to speak for laughing at any new gag or joke that he makes, even if it is not really a fully fledged joke, but merely a mild attempt at one; it gives the audience the impression that something extremely clever has been said, only *they* were not quite smart enough to catch it. But there was never any need for this complimentary camouflage with Huntley Wright; he was genuinely funny.

“The Producer” of the play was a very well-known man in those days. Now he is dead, and I—who metaphorically trembled before his frown—have actually forgotten his name! He was rather a terrible old man, and an awful tyrant; the way he used to drill, bully, and swear at the chorus enraged me when I heard it, but he did get fine results out of them in the end. I think he realised that I wanted to do my best, and took my work seriously, because, after a few sneers about “legitimate actresses,” “Shakespearean training,” and so forth, he was comparatively civil and helpful to me. One thing he certainly was not, and that was a snob. It mattered not at all to him whether

it was principal or chorus: if they annoyed him, he told them in just the plainest language what he thought.

One day, however, there came a clash of opinion between him and one of the stars—*the* Star, in fact, of the greatest magnitude. He wished her to make an exit at the end of the First Act in a particular way, so as to leave an effective grouping of the chorus for the curtain. She refused to do it. He said she should, she said she wouldn't, and, oh!—"the fur flew." Eventually she banged off the stage (that sounds vulgar, but it is true; her dressing-room door very distinctly banged), declaring she would not appear in the play at all, but go at once to Mr. Edwardes and throw up the part. Rehearsal was dismissed and consternation reigned.

Next morning George Edwardes himself, with a face of thunder, appeared upon the Bridge (the platform thrown over the orchestra from the stage, on which the producer and author sit during early rehearsals), and ordered the old producer out of the theatre. "He had insulted one of the ladies of the company, and he must go."

"He" (G. E.) "was master in his own theatre, and he meant to remain so, and one thing he would not allow, and that was that any lady, whether principal or chorus—he did not care which—should be insulted or sworn at." (Oh! oh! G. E.!) "In future he hoped that that would be properly understood, and now we would get on with it!" which we did, and the big star came on all smiles

and twinkling sweetness, and made her exit in the exact way which had been designed for her by the producer! She said, "That was the way *she* had *always* felt that it should be done." So that the end of the Act was saved, and all was well, for with a sardonic smile on his face the producer left the theatre never to return. But he left so cheerfully that I cannot help fancying that there may have been some private understanding, not unconnected with a cheque, between him and the great George; anyway, I happened to see them lunching amicably together later on. It was nearing the end of rehearsals, you see, and the producer's work was almost done. He *could* be spared without too much injury to the play, but the star could not; she was irreplaceable.

George Edwardes had a genius for government—he needed it with such a team to drive: composer, author, lyric composer (or composers), scenic artists, costumier, dressmakers, wigmakers, artificial florist, all the stars in all their courses, to say nothing of the rank and file of the company and the army of stage managers, stage hands, etc., etc. And that was in the days when there was generally only one author for the libretto. What is it like now when there are four or five, I do not know—and I do not think I much want to.

There was another autocrat, too, but, withal, a very kindly one. Mr. Percy Anderson, who designed the lovely dresses. He suffered tortures from the fact that some of the chorus ladies would insist upon wearing their modern jewellery with

their Oriental costumes, and *would* adapt their draperies to the mode they considered most becoming. My dresses were all exquisite. Mr. Anderson was so pleased with one of them that he did a fine poster of it (with, incidentally, a much glorified me inside).

After this tempest (no pun intended!) with the producer, Mr. Edwardes took the rehearsals himself. He was a wonderful stage manager, with a mighty flair for knowing the exact thing the public liked. He must have been a very handsome man in his time, with his magnificently-shaped head, covered with golden curls, and his big blue eyes, but when I knew him, through too much soft living—literally too much—of “wine, women, and song,” he had grown rather fat and coarse, though he was still striking looking. He usually spoke in a high, small voice, with an almost peevish whine in it, like a fretful child that thinks the world is not treating it well. It was strange to hear this small child’s pipe coming from the mountain of a man, but in the theatre it was the law of the Medes and Persians, all the same. There came a pathetic wail from the darkness of the theatre: “Can’t hear a word you’re saying, Letty, my dear; try to speak up, there’s a good girl” (she never could), or “Cut it out, my boy, cut it right out; not a damned bit of good,” and one knew that the “Governor was on the ‘warpath,’” and every one began to act up accordingly.

The author (Owen Hall) was one of the kind people who did speak to me at the beginning—he

even took me to lunch at the "Cavour" (which was considered a smartly Bohemian restaurant in those days), but it was the first occasion on which I had ever met plovers' eggs (you see what a ridiculous country mouse I was), and I was so occupied in deciding how they should be eaten (fingers surely should be reserved for asparagus) that I hardly managed to say a word to my host, and he must have found it very dull, for he never repeated the experiment.

I got a scolding from Mr. Edwardes next day, though—he did not happen to be on good terms with "Jimmie" just then—on making myself "cheap," and could not understand why. Oh! little Miss Innocence!

George Edwardes was a strange mixture. He could be extraordinarily generous with money, even before he became so rich, and he hated to be unkind, and never did an unkind thing, if he could help it, when once it was brought to his knowledge. (And what are a host of underlings for, if not to keep such knowledge away!) But he was self-indulgent and spoilt through too easy success, both in love and war. He started life as a call-boy, and worked up to the really fine position he held by his brains; and his organising ability and sense of what would please the public were undoubted; but he had arrived at a point when he had only to want a thing to decide that he would have it—and he generally succeeded in getting it. It is playing with loaded dice against virtue when, added to the usual glittering toys of temptation, the jewel casket

contains the certainty of a rise in her profession, perhaps to the very top of the tree, for an ambitious little chorus girl, hailing, maybe, from Tooting; with the added knowledge that if she is "ungrateful," she will probably remain in the chorus for the rest of her natural—or stage—life!

To be fair, he was generally quite kind and understanding with me—though one funny little incident did occur. After the play had been running for a few months, I got quietly married, and two days after I received my notice. Angrily, I dashed to the stage manager, demanding "What is the meaning of this?" He only smiled an enigmatic smile (it was "Pat" Malone) and said, "Can't be helped, dear. Guv'nor's orders." "Then I'll go to the Governor," said I. And go I did, and bearded the lion in his den—the softest, most padded den possible, I may remark; everything, from leather covered doors to armchairs and owner, being softness and puffiness.

Into this sanctum, then, burst an angry young woman, in all the conscious virtue of recent bridehood, bent upon "Larning her manager how to be a toad." At first he put up a fight and said that it was my own fault for getting married. "He had warned me not to." "The boys get to know about it, my dear," and I was not of any use to him if I was no longer an attraction to the "boys." At that the vials of my wrath opened upon him, and I told him plainly "that I had not taken the engagement to be 'attractive,' but to do my best as an actress, that I had never had and never should

have, the faintest interest in the 'boys,' that my private life had nothing to do with them, him, or any one else, and what my opinion was of all theatres which were run on such lines.

He took it like a lamb! Cornered as he was, he could do nothing; so "fed out of my hand"—to be exact, he patted it paternally (I believe he even carried his fatherliness so far as to offer to kiss me), soothed me, and withdrew the notice *sine die*. Also he told me "there would always be an engagement for me as long as he had a theatre," and that "he knew what a good woman was, and respected her," and ended by assuring me, with big tears rolling down his big cheeks, that "if only his dear mother had lived he would have been a different man," and would I use my influence for good with the other girls, particularly with one favourite little lady who was showing signs of "going downhill" with another man. (Oh! all Mr. Edwardeses and men of that ilk, why is it always "Love with a capital L," "Irresistible passion," or "The artistic temperament" when *les affaires* have to do with yourselves, but "Going downhill," or "Making a fool of herself," when another man is concerned?).

It was a funny scene, and yet I do not think that it was all humbug on the part of G. E. He was such a fine actor that he was able to deceive even himself. Besides, he was an Irishman. And, than the Irish—with all their brilliance and charm—it would be difficult to find a race more dramatic, or generally with less sense of humour, when the laugh is against themselves.

Mr. Edwardes was a strict catholic, too—I mean a strictly observing one—and the naughty girls in the theatre knew it, and took advantage of it. Even the beautiful Miriam once said to me, “The Guv’nor won’t give you a rise, dear? Nonsense! Tell him you’re an Irish catholic and he’ll double your salary.”

Mr. Edwardes was as good as his word, my notice was withdrawn. I finished the run of the play in triumph and comfort, and not only finished the run, but I was allowed to take on another engagement as well, and to play in a little sketch at the Palace Theatre with old Harry Paulton, during a long wait I had in the play at Daly’s.

It was great fun rushing between the two theatres. Their stage-doors are not very far apart, you know, and it only meant running up the passage and crossing Shaftesbury Avenue with one’s make-up on and a big cloak over one’s stage dress. It entailed a lot of changing of costume, though, and was rather tiring, but very pleasing on treasury nights.

The play at Daly’s was one of the biggest successes of that management. Hayden Coffin was, of course, the leading man: very handsome, very refined, very prolific of gesture—“gesture for infants,” we rather wickedly called it. “My two eyes, my ten toes, my pretty frock,” and “Point to them as you sing, dear” sort of thing; but he was always a fine artist, and I think he is almost handsomer now, with his white hair, than he was even then. Rutland Barrington was



Marie Tempest.

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also in the cast, and I have already mentioned Huntley Wright.

The leading lady was—— Now, which was the leading lady? Because there were two—stars of equal magnitude—Letty Lind and Marie Tempest, and both had their names on the bills in equally large letters, and both had star dressing-rooms just off the stage, and if one had a new chintz, or a fresh pincushion, the other always had a new one too, and the price paid for every detail had to be equally high—so which was *the* leading lady? Perhaps one was the English star and the other the Occidental, from the parts they were playing: (one a girl of the west, the other of the east), but how was one to judge which was the greater star? I rather fancy that Letty's room was a shade the larger, and a tiny bit nearer to the actual stage; but, on the other hand, there is no doubt which of the two would have been "spared" if it had come to a disagreement between them. They never did disagree, however, and it worked beautifully.

It is difficult to think of any one disagreeing with Letty of the twinkling feet, she was so sweet and amiable. She could not sing, and her speaking voice could not be heard! but she *could* dance, and the audience loved her and her little ways.

As for Marie Tempest, you have all been able to see her for yourselves, though perhaps you have not all been fortunate enough to hear her sing; and in those days I speak of she was both fine singer and fine actress. Temperamental, of course, but what a voice! and what magnetism! Artist

to her finger tips. I remember one day when I was standing in the wings, she came off the stage after an unusually enthusiastic recall, and said to me with tears in her eyes, "I'm an ugly little devil, but they like me!" Why has she stayed away from us on the other side of the world for so long?

I think that she only played in one or two more musical plays after this. Rumour said that she left Daly's in the end because she refused to wear the two or three inches of trouser that were insisted upon by the management for the part of a Chinese boy. Probably that was a *canard* (though Marie never would stand much interference or contradiction, especially as to dress); probably she left because she wished to take up legitimate work instead of musical comedy. Be that as it may, the part about which the dispute arose—*San Toy*—was played in the end, and played charmingly, by Florence Collingbourne, a dear little girl who really did get to the top from the chorus by merit only, for she would not leave "Auntie and Uncle," and she would not break off her engagement to a chorus gentleman, or accept fur coats, or French lessons, and yet she triumphantly kept the leading part through the run of *San Toy*, and has now virtuously vanished—married (though not, I think, the chorus gentleman), and is living, I hope, happily ever after.

Here is a true story to show George Edwardes's kindly side. He was motoring in Ireland, when he saw a farm labourer working on the road, all

bent with rheumatism. Mr. Edwards stopped his car to advise the man. "You've just the same rheumatism that I used to have, and I can tell you what to do about it. Now, you take my advice: no champagne, no port, just a little light Moselle with your meals, plenty of fruit, and a month every year at Carlsbad, and you'll be as right as a fiddle again in no time." Yes, truly, his was a kindly heart.

Only one more experience of musical comedy did I have, and that was some years later.

A really fine acting part it was this time, but in a theatre which was not nearly so "high-toned" as Daly's, though it was under George Edwardes's management too. I had met him again at some Irish races, and he had then and there offered me the part, showing a fine forgetfulness thereby. Evie Greene was the bright particular star in this play—what a glorious voice she had! and what a delightful personality. Too much artistic temperament for her own comfort, possibly, but she was a dear woman and a fine actress.

Another member of the company was quite extraordinarily handsome, with the finest bust and shoulders I have ever seen. She married the manager of the theatre during the run of the play (her second or third marriage—trifles like that did not count), and, of course, we had to give her a very handsome wedding present. Since then she has again married—this time into the Peerage—and is now starring in America. I mean the beautiful Kitty Gordon. I left before the end of

this play to take a joint engagement with my husband, and on the last night I was given a farewell supper in the Green Room, and the beautiful Kitty, though she and I had been at daggers drawn all the previous months, not only wept upon my chest at parting, but dragged off the three magnificent feathers that as a stage princess she was wearing on her headdress, and insisted upon my keeping them as a souvenir.

Of course they belonged to the management, and the management would have to replace them—but what of that! If you may not get the better of your theatrical manager, or your income-tax assessor, whom *may* you get the better of?—If you can!

CHAPTER VIII

W. S. Penley—Talent by Inches—An Engagement with Mrs. Patrick Campbell—Frank Harris, author—Her Leading Men—Frank Mills—Mr. Fred Kerr—Sir Gerald du Maurier—An Academy for Lovers—Professors du Maurier and Owen Nares—"Mrs. Pat"—Harvest Bugs—Pinkey—Dog or Canary?—Mrs. Campbell's Tact—Compliments—"Henbane"—"There was once a Poet"—Rehearsal at His Majesty's—Herbert Beerbohm Tree—Knight and Nightie—Imp or Angel—Miss Olga Nether-sole—John Oliver Hobbs—All purely Feminine—Court Trains—Olga Brandon—Mrs. Lewis Waller—Leonard Boyne.

My next engagement was rather a funny one. It was with Mr. Penley at the Kingsway Theatre, for a series of revivals of farces which he was then doing. I say funny, but I did not find the engagement altogether funny at the time, for, to be honest, Penley was by no means an easy manager to be with. I fancy that even then he was beginning to suffer from the ill-health to which he succumbed a year or two later, and that, no doubt, made him irritable; but at no time, I imagine, did he "suffer fools gladly."

I was engaged to play the chief girl's parts, and those chief girls in the farces of those days were generally more impossibly young than any baby could really be. Supposed to be about seventeen, they behaved with the intelligence of seven. In any case, I was much too tall to play the baby effectively, and as our leading young man was

over six feet two, between us we must have made little Mr. Penley look like a dwarf. Possibly that was the reason for our engagements; I cannot think that it was artistic suitability. I do not remember the names of the rest of the company, beyond the aforesaid leading man, who was Whitworth Jones, but it really did not much matter who they were, all the audience wanted was Penley—Penley in every possible and impossible situation, keeping them in roars of laughter from start to finish. What I do remember is, that all the company, whoever they were, were terrified of the little man and of his rages, though he could be very pleasant, too. I shall never forget one day when he took "his company" (he was very possessive about "his company," and proud of them—rightly so, if he measured their value by inches) to play at a Garden Fête, which was being held for some charity near Windsor; at the Bryant's place, I think it was. By his special request the ladies were all attired in their very best—their Sunday best, you understand—not summer best, which might have been cool and appropriate. The actress who played "Aunts," for instance, wore crushed strawberry silk, with a princess bonnet (the mode then) carried out in pansies; the men all appeared in high hats and morning coats; and very uncomfortable we felt when we arrived before lunch to find that we were not expected until the afternoon.

The hostess, a charming woman, did her best to make it appear that a table laid for six was really

meant for sixteen, and the women at least, of the company, quickly found seats and were supplied with food. But we did not enjoy ourselves. To use one of Mr. Penley's own lines from the *Private Secretary*, we were "not happy."

I left Mr. Penley soon after that, and was engaged by Mrs. Patrick Campbell, who was then running the Royalty Theatre. She had a fine company around her there. Frank Mills was her leading man—the handsome American actor, who has since died. Later on Mr. Fred Kerr joined her for a play called *Mr. and Mrs. Daventry*, by Frank Harris. Stage rumour had it that it had really been written, or partly written, by Oscar Wilde, but the rumour had probably no better foundation than that the play was one of the then popular domestic-triangle ones, and contained many epigrams, and the fact that Mr. Harris only appeared at one rehearsal, and no one could possibly believe in an author who only wanted to see one rehearsal of his own play!

Mr. Kerr did not remain with Mrs. Campbell for very long. I fancy he must have been one of the few leading men who did not succumb to her fascination right away (perhaps he is not easily fascinated); they used to differ considerably at rehearsals, and as she was by far the cleverer with her tongue, it generally ended in his being made to look foolish, which, of course, he did not like. Clever artist as he is, I imagine that he is not always an easy one to get on with when things do not go exactly according to his liking.

George Arless was also a member of the company, so was Gerald du Maurier—Sir Gerald now, of course! I shall always remember a charming love scene which the latter played with Mrs. Campbell in that same *Mr. and Mrs. Daventry*. It was a delightful and tender love scene, and he knelt at her feet and kissed her hands like a knight of old. I remember it, because it struck me as so un-(stage) conventional. Perhaps that is one of the chief secrets of du Maurier's popularity: he makes love in such a real manner. The exact manner in which the ordinary young women in the audience longs to be made love to (and every normal young woman does long to be made love to. I say it advisedly: it all depends upon the degree of love-making and the way in which it is done).

A nice little girl comes to me nowadays to do sewing. She is pretty enough for anything, and engaged to be married to a quite excellent young man. They are only waiting until he earns £400 a year before they marry, they could not possibly manage on less, she says! Well! well! things have changed since the war! I knew a young couple, in the long ago, I knew them very well—But that is another story.

This little maid said to me one day in a wistful voice, "Oh, madam, it would be nice to be made love to like Mr. Owen Nares does it in the pictures. I suppose love is never like that in real life, is it?" I hastened to assure her (thinking of the excellent young man) that, of course, it never was—the pictures were always untrue to life in that particular.

But, all the same, it is a rather pathetic story, don't you think? Here is a suggestion for Messrs. du Maurier and Nares. If ever they should happen to get old and lose all their money (most improbable happenings, of course), let them start an "Academy for Lovers"; then the rich young man of Mayfair can take course after course of lessons, until he is turned out almost the perfect article that they are themselves, and 'Arry from the east, and the poor working man (if such a thing still exists) can drop in of an evening for "'arf a dollar's worth o' tips," and no more shall we hear of such conversations as the one supposedly heard in a railway carriage:—

She : 'Arry, don't cher love me?

He : Not 'arf.

She : Then why don't cher muss me abaht?

I seem to have wandered a long way from Mrs. Campbell; we had better return to her. With such an interesting personality at the head of affairs, an engagement in her company was sure to be far from dull, and dull it was not! Looking back, it seems to me that we spent all our time alternately adoring and hating her. Mrs. Campbell's power of fascination is more than charm; it is magnetism—one can really feel a sort of electric wave, or something of the kind, when she passes by. She could make any one in the theatre do anything in the world for her when she chose, and yet there was nearly always some actress sobbing in the green room, or some actor swearing in his dressing-room, over something that Mrs. Campbell had said

to them, by which their feelings—or maybe only their vanity—had been hurt. Her sayings were like Harvest Bugs, you know, those horrid little red things that burrow under one's skin in the summer—you don't feel the bite at the time, and it is not until hours afterwards that the maddening irritation begins. Mrs. Campbell would say things so sweetly, and wrap them up so nicely, that one only felt vaguely uncomfortable at first, and half wondered why one did so. It was not until some time after that one realised that the barb was poisoned—and *meant* to stick. This sounds cruel, and I do not want to imply that she was deliberately so, only she was so brilliantly clever herself that stupidity in others irritated her, and it gave her pleasure to say witty things, even, perhaps, to watch people writhe under them. She once told me frankly, "I cannot help it. I have so much to worry me privately, and when "Pinkie is sick on the mat," I must take it out of my company."

"Pinkie" was her adored little dog—a horrible little griffon—the very smallest, finest bred griffon possible, but very old, with sticks, which seemed as if they must snap off, instead of legs, long claws, and prominent waggling teeth. He always had to be nursed by some one (he might have been trodden on, the poor little rat, if he had been put on the ground), and it was considered a mark of special favour to be permitted to hold him. When Mrs Campbell took him with her to America, where dogs were not allowed in restaurants, she would hold him up in the manager's face when remonstrated with,

and say, " But you don't call that a dog—it's a long-haired canary! "

There was a great fuss, too, on her return to England when they refused to let Pinkie through the customs. All sorts of legal luminaries and grandees tried to get the law relaxed on her behalf, unfortunately, without avail, and when, at last, Mrs. Campbell had to leave the poor little thing in quarantine, she slipped off her splendid, long sealskin coat and left it in a heap on the floor for her to snuggle into. To be parted from her was a real grief, and I am not sure if she even lived to come out—if she did, she died soon afterwards, and was replaced by another perfect specimen of the same breed—" Georgina "—equally loved by her mistress, but younger, and therefore more attractive to others than poor Pinkie.

I suppose that Mrs. Campbell was, and is, one of the wittiest women of the age: her witty sayings are numerous and well known, but it is very difficult to give the right effect of them in cold print, especially to any one who does not know her—the delicate nuances of her wonderful voice, her intonations, and the slight drawl which she sometimes affects are all required to bring out the full flavour.

On one occasion she took me with her to a certain play. She had been sent a box by the American millionaire who was just then running the theatre, and endeavouring to make the British public accept as a great actress a lady in whom only the eyes of friendship could perceive the necessary qualifications

for the rôle. The heroine of the play should have been a young, romping girl; the actress was large, quite large, but not quite in her first youth, and the resulting performance could hardly be called satisfactory. Between the acts the millionaire-manager came to Mrs. Campbell's box, and was foolish enough to ask her what she thought of his leading lady. She had been expressing herself very frankly on the subject to me a minute before, but, of course, she was equal to the occasion.

"Oh! she is Great—G-r-r-eat!" she cooed, "she is too Great for this small theatre, you should take the Coliseum." (I wonder if the poor millionaire felt a harvest bug later on!)

Mrs. Campbell was, of course, very beautiful in those days, and her stage dresses were exquisite, and so expressive of the part she was taking; but, my goodness! what a dance she led her dress-makers! They adored her, though, all the same. She had a lovely figure—so slim and willowy—and she was so proud of that slimness. She wailed to me once, pathetically, "I am so tired, so tired. I have to go about always with my head in the air, but I would rather live a double life than have a double chin."

I do not believe that any manager (or author) ever really "managed" Mrs. Campbell, though I have heard that Mr. Pinero could do so. At the beginning of rehearsals they would say:—

"Mrs. Campbell? a charming woman—charming! Get on with her? Of course I get on with her, my dear fellow. She just wants a little

managing, you know—a little tact, but charming, charming!”

But before the end of the run, it was another story. They were nearly off their heads, as a rule, and murmured words quite unfit for publication. And one distraught stage manager, more racy than refined, is known to have exclaimed aloud, “Oh, my God! but isn’t she all the ‘B’s.’”

Yes, she was difficult; and she would often tire of a part, and begin to play the fool in it after the play had run for a few weeks, and sometimes, even if she liked the part—and Heaven help the author if she did not—she would start fooling from the very beginning.

She had such a keen sense of humour, it seemed to overpower everything else. The story is well known of how, during the run of *Mrs. Tanqueray*, Mr. Alexander sent a message to her room, saying:—

“Mr. Alexander’s compliments, and he would be obliged if Mrs. Campbell would not laugh at him on the stage,” to which she sent back the reply:—

“Mrs. Campbell’s compliments, and she will wait till she gets home.”

I had heard that Mrs. Campbell herself denied that story, and said “she could never have been so vulgar,” but as she mentions it herself in her fascinating, *My Life and Some Letters*, it is no doubt true, and the following little stories I can vouch for. Once when a certain well-known manager sent for her to offer her the leading part in the dramatisation of a then very popular

and much read novel, which we will call *Henbane*, and possibly allowed a little of the favour he felt himself to be conferring to appear in his manner (as managers are occasionally inclined to do). Her reply, given in her most bored and drawling voice, was, "*Henbane? Henbane?* Oh, yes, I believe I did begin to read the book, but it was so vulgar I threw it away—I think it fell into the slop pail."

And yet again:—

"There was once a poet; two neighbouring countries contended for the honour of his birth, and he wrote many beautiful verses; but the poem which above all increased his fame, so that his name was known even beyond the borders of Mayfair, Belgravia, and Chelsea—yea, known unto the cultured ones of Birmingham, Manchester, and Glastonbury—was a poem called "*Diana and the Soldier*."

Thereafter did the poet indite a play.

"My play," said he, "is indeed beautiful; it shall be played only by the beautiful." And he wrote a letter unto a certain Mrs. Patrick Campbell, who dwelt in the Square called Kensington—an actress of great talent—to tell her of the honour which he purposed to confer upon her, and to request an interview.

At the appointed hour of the day did the poet arrive at the house of the actress, whereat she rose and advanced to greet him.

"Oh!" she said, and her voice was like unto slow silver bells, and of the sweetness of honey in

the honeycomb. "I am so glad, so ve-ry glad to meet you, Mr. ——. It *was* you, was it not? who wrote the charming music to that very dull poem, "Diana and the Soldier"!"

Only once again after the Royalty season was I in the same play as Mrs. Campbell. It was at His Majesty's, and on that occasion it pleased her ladyship to fascinate every person in the theatre, from the author to the call-boy, except the manager, Herbert Beerbohm Tree, and this did not make his task any easier when he disagreed with the lady at rehearsals! For instance, rehearsals at His Majesty's were always terribly long, and Mr. Tree was always at his brightest and best towards two or three o'clock in the morning, and never minded how late he worked. Perhaps it would be getting near the date of production, and at about midnight the company would still be rehearsing, having been at it since morning, with only an hour or two's break. Still, things at last would be beginning to move. Tree knew his words—nearly—and was getting well into his part.

"We will do that scene once more," he would say cheerfully. "It is shaping well, I think." And then a sweet voice would float softly to him from the stalls or wings:—

"Oh! Mr. Tree, couldn't the poor girls go home now; they are so hungry and *so* tired."

She was quite right, they were; but it was a nasty point for a manager. Sacrifice his play and dismiss rehearsal (I never knew that to really happen, I may remark) or continue, and be thought

a brute, and know that all his company were contrasting his brutality with Mrs. Campbell's sweetness and kindness. It *was* sweet and kind of her, of course—to the girls.

Sir Herbert (then Mr. Tree) in this play used to wear a long, straight cassock-like garment, and also a bald head, and to sit on a high throne in the centre of the stage. Mrs. Campbell, standing in the wings, in the middle of the dress rehearsal, said solemnly, but not, perhaps, too softly, to some one, "Don't you think him sweet? Isn't he *just* like dear Queen Victoria?"

Mr. Tree became Sir Herbert during the course of those rehearsals, and, of course, we all congratulated him. "Mrs. Pat's" contribution to the chorus of good wishes was, "Oh! Sir Herbert! how wonderful to be a knight, and now, of course, dear Maud is a nightie!"

Irritated as sometimes he was with her (and I have seen him stamp on the mat like a—well, like a buck rabbit, with suppressed fury), I am sure that Sir Herbert had much too keen a sense of humour himself not to appreciate her wit all the same.

"Lady Patricia," in Rudolf Besier's delightful play of that name, is taken exactly from her, or, rather, from one side of her. She must surely have realised this, and yet she was sporting enough to play the part, gloriously laughing at herself—and play it divinely, too, until it ceased to amuse her, when the Imps of Mischief in her got the better of the Angel of Art, and she became what she

herself calls "naughty." But, after all, Mrs. Campbell is too fine an artist and too complex a woman for me to criticise.

One is so grateful for her Art and her Wit; almost, like Matthew Arnold on Shakespeare, might one say:—

"Others abide our question, Thou art free."

And for this somewhat profane conjunction of names may Mrs. Campbell, in the unlikely event of her seeing these remarks, extend to me her forgiveness.

Another actress manageress that I was with was Miss Olga Nethersole: in those days "manageresses" were more uncommon than now, when we have Gladys Cooper, Marie Lohr, Gertrude Elliott, and so many others. Such a fine thing they make of management, too—one is proud of one's sex. (I *could* tell you a lot of little storyettes about these charming folk, too! But that would be outside the scope of this history—they are "since my day.") The play for which Miss Nethersole engaged me was put on at the Shaftesbury Theatre, and was by John Oliver Hobbs (Mrs. Craigie), then at the height of her fame.

It was a very elaborate play, I remember, and a very expensive one to mount. It was about royalties—foreign royalties—and there were a lot of parts in it, modelled on real Society people. (I believe that I was meant to be a sort of Lady Warwick.) There were also six beautiful ladies with about three lines each, whose only reason for

being there at all was that their characters were copied from real people in Society. Now it is not easy to give character to three lines, simply by being told to "wear an eyeglass," or "lisp a little," or sound your r's like w's, as "dear Gladys" or "darling Susan do." And though the drawing from real people may have been amusing to their friends in Society (with a big S), the ordinary folk among the audience were merely puzzled and bored.

In the production, a great feature was made of the dresses, which came from Jay's, and were very good to look upon. I shall never forget going to be fitted for mine. A Mr. Hiley was the dress-designer there then—a very well-known man, the "great Mr. Hiley"—and I stood robed in green silk upon a little platform, with electric lights all round me to imitate stage lights, while the "great man" recklessly, and regardless of expense, slashed off bits from lengths of priceless ribbon, held for him by adoring damsels, and jabbed the bits on to me with pins, just as if I were a pincushion: he was trying the effect of each colour with the green scheme of my dress, and exclamations of "Oh, Mr. Hiley!" "How heavenly!" "Oh! isn't that perfect now." "Oh—oh—oh—!" came from the attendant girls all the while. I wanted to put that scene into a play on the spot, but never did. Of course, Edward Knoblock has since done it, or, rather, done something very much better, and "Hiley" was perfectly portrayed in *My Lady's Dress*.

My dress really was a great success in the end,

but, unfortunately for the six lovely ladies, by the time it came to their dresses expenses must have been mounting up too fast, so theirs—though fine to look upon—had cotton linings to the skirts. Now it was the day of very full, very long skirts, to walk in which on the stage was a real art. No self-respecting actress in a “Society” play ever dreamt of raising her skirt in front with her hand when going up stage (really up, you know, for most stages slant upwards towards the back); it would have been a confession that she did not know how to walk properly; so, instead, she had to accomplish miracles in the way of stage glides, kicking out her dress in front of her as she went. I often think how much easier it must be for girls to move on the stage in the very short skirts of nowadays; though, say what you will, it is not so graceful, and, if they should happen to have thick ankles, the revelations are terrible! With a little practice it was quite possible then to be graceful, in a silk-lined skirt, which was light and stood away from one’s feet, but it was quite another thing, as the six unfortunate ladies found, when one had yards and yards of heavy cotton material clinging to one and twining itself round one’s legs. Poor girls! Their first-night performance was really pathetic (the dresses had not been finished in time for the dress rehearsal); they stumbled and they lurched, and at last in despair picked their dresses up in front in order to get about. The next morning a rehearsal was called and the six sent for to the table where sat Miss Nethersole, Mrs. Craigie,

and the rest of the management, and they were told severely "that it was a pity they did not know how to walk like ladies." At that, without one moment's hesitation, were six little parts of one page each, neatly bound in brown paper "thrown down" (to be exact, placed upon the table), and the management were formally given six resignations. "They did not mind being told about their acting," they said, "but they would *not* be told that they did not know how to behave like ladies." It took quite half an hour on the part of Mrs. Craigie—a really charming woman—of walking up and down the stage arm in arm with each of those ladies individually before they could be sufficiently soothed and placated by the promise of silk linings, to take up their parts again and remain in the play.

Miss Nethersole was very fine as the princess heroine in this play. I do not remember the plot, but I know there was a coronation scene at the end, in which all the ladies on the stage had to sink into magnificent curtseys when she entered, and remain so crouched while she delivered a long, long speech from the throne. (It was such a long speech that most of us found it easier to sink on to our knees while we were about it.) I have often wondered at what sort of court the etiquette calling for such an impossibly long curtsey could be found! But then, Miss Nethersole was not a very tall woman, and the picture of her standing in queenly dignity, surrounded by crouching, court-tailed, court-feathered ladies was no doubt most effective!



Mrs. Patrick Campbell.

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About this time I had another short experience with another woman manageress—Olga Brandon. Poor Miss Brandon, what a fine actress she was when she played with Willard, and what a tragedy her uncontrolled temperament was to herself.

A very different actress-manageress was Mrs. Lewis Waller. She was a splendid business woman, and a delightful manageress to be with. I was with her for two engagements at different times. One was in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* at the Comedy, and the other one in *Zaza*. Leonard Boyne was her leading man in the latter—such a fine actor. I can quite understand his almost irresistible attraction when he was young, but we found him just a little difficult at rehearsals.

CHAPTER IX

Death of Queen Victoria—Her Last Drive—The Boer War—State Processions—Coronets and Wigs—A State Stage Manager—Lord Kitchener's Return—Plastrons—Lord Roberts's Funeral—Buckingham Palace—An Audience there—The "Divinity that doth Hedge a King"—Mystery—A Command Performance—Another—An Audience with the Pope—"My Reading of the Part"—"The Three Musketeers"—Two Versions—Mrs. Brown Potter and the "Light Brigade"—Gabrielle—Lady Tree—"Pay, Pay, Pay"—Too Realistic.

QUEEN VICTORIA's death ended Mrs. Patrick Campbell's season at the Royalty, for though the theatre did open again after the week of mourning, during which all theatres and places of amusement were closed, business never picked up, and after a time Mrs. Campbell let the theatre to some one else. By the way, I fancy that the Royalty was one of the first theatres to be upholstered in green; it was just at the time when green was coming into fashion for furniture and decorations (a result, probably, of the æsthetic craze). Mrs. Campbell had the whole theatre charmingly re-done in that colour.

Queen Victoria's death was a real shock to her people: of course she was old, but somehow it never seemed as if a time could come when she "was not." She had reigned for so long, she had become a sort of national institution, like the British Museum or the Albert Memorial. Later

in the year, too, came the serious illness of King Edward, necessitating the postponement of the coronation on the very eve of the day on which it should have taken place.

It was an attack of appendicitis that the poor King suffered from, and it set the fashion for appendicitis, which raged for years afterwards. All the prophetic ravens croaked dismally over a postponed coronation, and said that "Now he never would be crowned," but he was—triumphantly—a few months later.

What, however, was the chief cause of the theatre depression of that time was, of course, the Boer War. It seemed so sad that the old Queen's life should end under that cloud. It must have been terrible for her to have to think of England, her Imperial England (only just made Imperial), her "kingdom on which the sun never set," being held up, almost beaten, by insignificant farmers, in an obscure continent like South Africa! I remember her last public drive through London during the autumn before her death: such a little lonely figure she looked, such a tiny woman to have so great a weight on her royal shoulders.

Her funeral was a very solemn and magnificent pageant. I think it was about the first really big state pageant I had ever seen—of course, there had been her Jubilee and Diamond Jubilee, but my only recollections of them are bonfires, and a children's fancy dress ball. There were fewer good State shows then than there are now, when we have become almost *blasé* with them: two

royal funerals, two coronations, war processions, weddings, above all, armistice and peace processions: it is difficult to think of anything new in that way now.

I remember when Kitchener came home after his successful campaign in the Boer War—it must, I think, have been during King Edward's convalescence, for Queen Alexandra alone stood on the balcony of Buckingham Palace to see him drive past along the Mall. She was wearing the largest size of white "plastron" on the front of her bodice on that occasion—I always connect "plastrons" with Queen Alexandra! Kitchener looked very cross and solemn, as if he did not at all care about the cheers of the people. I wonder if he really disliked publicity, or if his glum looks were more or less a pose which fitted with the pose of the "strong, silent man." I know that it was not nearly so impressive a triumph as it ought to have been, our triumphant processions after this war were far better managed; but then, of course, we had far more to feel triumphant about, and the cheers really came from the heart.

Even in those processions, though, with the exception of the Armistice Day celebrations, it is perhaps possible that a greater impressiveness might have been attained by better stage management.

Now that is an idea! A real professional Stage Manager of State Ceremonies. Of course, there is an extremely clever director now: the Lord Chamberlain—but I mean some one purely

professional for small details, who knows the "tricks of the trade." (What fun he would have, and what lovely "properties" to play with: crowns and gilded coaches and the rest!) For instance, the chief impression that remains with me of King Edward's coronation, is of how perfectly absurd all the wearers of crowns and coronets looked! The King himself was a fine figure—"every *acre* a King," as our French friends used to say when he went over there—and carried his crown off fairly well; besides, sitting by him was such a vision of beauty, such an ideal Queen, that it was difficult to look at any one else. But the rest of the coronet wearers! Sometimes the coronet was too large, and slanted backwards, covering the back of the head, sometimes too small, and slipped slightly sideways, but in whatever position, it was generally ridiculous, and always the wearer wore an unhappy expression, as if he knew that he was looking absurd. Not even the most indifferent professional stage manager would have permitted a super to go on the stage with so undignified an appearance; and yet at our most solemn State functions the performers are allowed to look like that! And it could all be avoided so simply. I make an offer of this suggestion, free, gratis, and for nothing, to all wearers of coronets at the next State celebration: crowns and coronets should be worn with *wigs*, nice clubbed wigs, like the knaves in a pack of cards, or, if preferred, the full-bottomed, curly wigs of the William and Mary period; but

wigs of some sort are inevitable, if dignity is to be attained. When crowns and coronets were first designed (don't ask me when that was!) they most certainly were not intended to be worn with cropped hair, then why try to wear them so? As well put on a tall hat with a Roman toga.

Another occasion, some years later, which would have benefited much by a Dramatic Stage Manager, was the funeral of Lord Roberts. The material was all there, for a much-loved man had died verily for his country, working for her till the last. A funeral march, the flag-covered coffin on the gun-carriage, the charger behind, and just a small military escort, and people would have been carried away to the point of making almost any sacrifice to follow the example of the hero who had gone. (Emotionalism? Perhaps, but emotion was needed to cover up the unspeakable horror of the War.) Instead of which, there were miles upon miles of marching and mounted men, bands at too long distances, and so the whole thing, even the passing of the gun-carriage, fell flat.

If there is to be a State procession, then let it be an effective one, and properly stage-managed.

England is proud, and rightly so, of its kings and queens (they may be a luxury, but they are a very dignified one, and surely England can still afford some luxuries); perhaps the real affection in which the present Royal Family is held is a good exchange for the "Divinity-that-doth-hedge-a-king" spirit of olden time. (Figure to yourself a crowd in the time of, say, Richard II., shouting

outside the royal residence, "We—want—the King! We—want—the King!" and getting him, too!) Still, I think that a little more stage managing and mystery might have its advantage at times, even now.

During the war, like most other women, I was on a committee for a War Hospital, and the work turned out so successfully that Her Majesty most graciously invited—or should the word be commanded?—us to a special audience at the palace. Imagine how thrilling! Driving into the inner courtyard, just as if one was an ordinary "caller" going to visit a friend! No guards, no band, no waiting, like there is on drawing-room days: you just got out of your car—(of *course* it had to be a car; no taxis are permitted inside the inner courtyard of Buckingham Palace—or Hyde Park!—but you may go on foot. I did!) and walked up a red carpet, and there you were!

It was a very cold morning, and the palace struck me as a particularly comfortable house to live in, made especially so by the blazing wood fires everywhere, for it was during the days of the coal shortage, when every little lump of coal was petted and tended with the greatest care. (Two bachelor-girl friends of mine even went so far as to put their last lump of coal in an orange-coloured bowl on the dinner table, as the most rare and precious ornament their Flat contained.) Those big wood fires were a most cheery sight. We were shown into a splendid red room, carefully arranged in a row by high officials (I apologise to

them most humbly for not knowing their rank), and requested very firmly to keep exactly those places; then, after a few minutes of waiting (I feel sure that the Queen never keeps people waiting for long), the folding doors opened, and without any announcement, but with immense dignity, and with white, bediamond hands resting upon a blue velvet waist, in walked the Queen.

It *was* impressive; her dignity made it that, her—I can only call it queen-consciousness (that is not at all the same thing as self-consciousness). After all, if you are the Queen of England, you *are* somebody, you are unique, the only specimen of the kind in the whole world, and that thought must give dignity. She was most kind and gracious, and, with that marvellous royal memory, she made some individual remark to every one of us (there must have been ten or twelve) as she shook hands. She remembered “Who had been engaged in any other good work before,” “Who’s brother had been killed at the front,” “Whom she had heard singing,” and so forth. The royal memory is wonderful, and, of course, kept well lubricated; only a thought did flash through my mind, what *would* have happened if we had changed our places before the Queen came in! It was a ribald thought.

There was only one—just one tiny hitch. No—hitch is too strong a word for anything so perfect as a royal audience. Shall we say hesitation? It was when the charming member of our committee whose duty it was to make the speech began to do

so. It must have been an ordeal! She advanced half-way down the room towards Her Majesty, and made the lowest of curtseys; but a modern short skirt is the wrong garment to make a curtsey in, and perhaps she felt the chill on her knee, for she only got as far as "May it please your Majesty," when she stopped with a helpless gasp of "I've forgotten." There was silence, an awful silence; it struck me that a tiny sympathetic laugh from the audience, or even a little applause, such as is given to encourage an actor who "dries up," would have been very helpful, but no doubt it would not have been etiquette. Etiquette was evidently "to ignore." To ignore the fact that anything even remotely resembling a hitch could possibly have occurred. Therefore the queen stood still (royal hands still duly folded), and ignored. Princess Mary, just behind her, ignored, though she was such a girl surely there must have been a twinkle at the back of her eyes, though none showed at the front; the lady-in-waiting ignored; all the gentlemen of the court and officials ignored, as hard as they could; and we of the committee endeavoured to follow their example—until, at long, long last (quite a second or two, in fact) the secretary who had originally written the speech whispered the words to the unfortunate lady, and she finished her task: the incident was finally ignored—and all was well.

Thinking it over, I believe that on the whole the gracious wish to give pleasure is of more importance than pomp and ceremony, and, as I

say, it *was* impressive; only—only think what it might have been: “A magnificent fanfare of trumpets, the folding doors are thrown back, and a loud voice announces: ‘Her Majesty the Queen!’ Down flop we all upon the carpet with our faces to the ground, and into the midst of us is carried a curtained litter—or perhaps a veiled figure glides in, encased in clinging, floating draperies.” (Oh!—clinging, floating draperies, the Queen? Yes, of course, why not!) One ought never to see the feet of a god or of royalty—not walking feet, at least; means of progress must only be guessed at to attain real dignity. Think of the pictures on the movies when the King and Queen are filmed *walking* in a royal procession, and you will agree with me.

I hope I have not seemed flippant in recounting this audience—it is not that I did not appreciate the honour—at the time, believe me, I was most impressed; it is only afterwards that the funny little points obtrude themselves in one’s memory.

A command performance at Windsor must be very interesting, but a terrible ordeal for the actors, all the same.

An extremely popular actor-manager relates—and he is a man famous for his absolute *sang-froid* on the stage—how once when he was giving a command performance, and stood waiting for the curtain to go up, he was attacked with such a terrible feeling of nausea that he felt he should everlastingly disgrace himself. “There was no time,” he says, “to keep the curtain down; the

King and Queen were waiting ; no time to rush to my dressing-room ; no time for anything but prayer : O God, don't let me be sick. O God, don't let me be sick." He didn't. The performance was a great success; and now, most appropriately, the actor-manager has been rewarded.

I think that is rather a charming story, but perhaps the London church which, a little while ago, "requested the prayers of the congregation for the success of the play to be produced at the — Theatre next Wednesday" went a little far! It seems a rather "large order" to expect a bad play turned into a good one by Divine intervention.

Of course, all companies giving command performances at Windsor are very well looked after (though there is a stage story that the wife and leading actress of a certain actor-manager, when asked by royalty if she had been comfortable, replied, "Well, ma'am, of course the dressing-rooms are very poor"). But there is a strict etiquette, and curtseys and bows and all the rest of it to observe, which in themselves are nervous work.

I do not like the modern "bob" curtsey (you may already have gathered that fact! I apologise); falling on the knees is a much more picturesque proceeding. In Rome, now, when one is going over the Galleries of the Vatican, and sees through an ironwork door at the end of a long corridor the impressive figure of His Holiness passing, down on one's knees one flops—at least, of course, one

need not "flop" unless one likes, but it is so ungracious in Rome not to do as Rome does.

Since I seem to have switched right away from the stage people I have met on to a much more exalted plain, perhaps I may mention here an audience I was privileged to have with Pope Pius X. It was very interesting, and he was very kind and "apart": he blessed quite a lot of "charms" for me (I know I ought not to call them "charms," but they were), none of which brought me luck, and all of which were lost soon afterwards; perhaps they took their blessings to the finder. I hope so, though he, or she, might have returned them to Scotland Yard, so that I could have regained them and had my chance. The whole audience was most carefully and effectively stage managed. Yes, the Roman Catholic church does understand stage management—and we remained on our knees the whole time. I remember, too, in the audience chamber, while waiting to go in (the ladies were, of course, all dressed in black, with black lace mantillas over their heads), the secretary priest came to me, and carefully wrapped the ends of my mantilla round each of my forearms, requesting that I should keep them so wrapped up, for as I had removed my gloves (naturally, one had to do that), he saw that two or three inches of bare arm would otherwise be visible between my hand and my sleeve! Now, what harm could the sight of a few inches of nice, round forearm have done His Holiness, or any one else, I wonder! Yet so it was.

By the way, I hear that when a very successful "movie," which was shown not long ago, and in which a Pope figured, was being filmed, in one scene the leading star (Oh! a very, very big star!) slapped His Holiness on the back, and when the producer frantically expostulated that "no man would have dared to do such a thing in those devout mediæval days," the star replied, "That is *my* reading of the part, anyway" . . . and the record was made so. If "nice customs curtsy to great kings," what must they do to cinema stars?

Talking of *The Three Musketeers*. (Oh! *were* we talking of *The Three Musketeers*? Evidently a slip!) Two versions of that play were running in London at that time, I mean about the time of the Boer War. One was at His Majesty's, with Mr. Tree as D'Artagnan, and Mrs. Brown Potter as Mi'lady. What a lovely woman Mrs. Brown Potter was, with her beautiful red hair! Of course, every one theatrical was appearing a great deal for war charities at that time, and I remember hearing Mrs. Brown Potter at a charity matinée at the Alhambra recite "The Charge of the Light Brigade," with all that was left of the Balaclava veterans standing behind her in a row on the stage. It did not seem to me an altogether dignified use to make of our heroes—a background for an actress; but perhaps they liked doing it.

The other version of *The Musketeers* was at the Lyceum Theatre, where Lewis Waller was running it and playing D'Artagnan with enormous success. Lily Hanbury was the Mi'lady there, and Eva

Moore the most charming of Gabrielles. One night when I was present an accident happened. There is a scene in which the queen (it was Kate Rorke) gives a private audience to D'Artagnan: they hear the king coming, and Gabrielle, the lady-in-waiting, hastily tries to smuggle the hero out of a private door. She dashes to that door, and on finding it locked, hammers wildly on it, crying out "Locked ! Locked ! My God, what shall I do ?" But on the night I speak of, Lily Hanbury, who made an exit by that same door earlier in the scene, had forgotten to put the bar across the back, with the result that when Eva Moore rushed up to it and hurled herself against it, expecting to find it firmly fastened, it gave way, and she fell headlong through, still, however, crying "Locked ! Locked ! What shall I do ! " While only two little feet—and legs (and quite some of them!) were to be seen. The audience shouted with laughter, and the actors had to join them in it eventually—there was nothing else to do.

Eva once told me of another stage accident that she had. She was playing in London, and Charles Fulton as the villain of the play had to shoot her with a pistol. Harry Esmond,¹ her very young and devoted husband, was not himself in the play and was terribly anxious that Fulton should not aim the pistol at his wife's face, but over her head. He was soothed, and promised that the greatest care should be taken, and all went well until about

¹ Since the above was written both his public and personal friends have sorrowed for the death of H. V. Esmond.

the fourth night, when Eva suddenly felt what she thought was a bullet on her upper lip—she was certain that her mouth and all her teeth had gone, and that she was disfigured for life; however she managed to do her dying fall all the same, and the curtain went down. Then, of course, all the actors were horrified to see her mouth bleeding! A doctor was sent for, and Charlie Hallard, who also was in the play, and H. V. Esmond's great friend, dashed, just as he was, in a motor-car to the Green Room Club to break the news to Harry. He meant to be very cautious, but he was so excited that he gasped, "Old man, old man! She is shot!" and a wild H. V. Esmond, certain his wife was killed, dashed to the theatre, met an apologetic Fulton with a "Damn you—damn you," burst into Eva's room, and found her bathing a badly swollen face, certainly, but very much alive.

The idiot of a property man had stuffed the pistol with wet wash-leather on the top of the gunpowder, instead of the thin paper he should have used, and, of course, the leather had dried and hardened into a nasty pellet: but no serious harm was done.

Mrs. Tree played the part of the Queen at Her Majesty's. Alfred Brydone, Gerald du Maurier, and Edmund Maurice were also in the cast.

Mrs. Tree was working very hard at that time, collecting money for war charities by reciting Kipling's "Absent Minded Beggar"; she must

have been very surprised, and perhaps a little frightened, the first time she pleaded—

“ Pass the hat for your credit’s sake and
Pay, Pay, Pay,”

at the shower of coppers and other coins which descended upon her. Afterwards the money was collected in a more orthodox manner, but she continued to recite the verses at the Palace for many weeks, giving not only the resultant money, but her own salary as well to the charity.

Oh! how sick one did get at that time of that “ Absent Minded ” one. Sir Arthur Sullivan set “ him ” to music, and turned him into a song, which made his popularity still more aggressive. One never went to a charity matinée without knowing that he would be trotted out. It is not a soul-uplifting refrain anyway, “ Pay, Pay, Pay,” particularly when, as so often happened, it was “ Py, Py, Py.”

The—er—poem got its death blow eventually at a South London music hall (Lambeth it should have been). The story is well known, but it is so good as to be worth repeating. A certain famous society beauty undertook to recite it in the blessed cause of charity. It was getting just a little old by that time, and, being a lady of dramatic tendencies, she yearned to give it a fresh touch, so had the wonderful inspiration of dressing herself as Britannia, and surrounding herself by her own four beautiful little boys dressed in khaki or sailor



Eva Moore. (From old photograph).

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suits, two of each. It was a charming picture! Unfortunately, the lady was a little nervous; she began in a timid, almost apologetic tone—pushing forward each little boy as she mentioned him—

“ Duke’s son, cook’s son, son of a belted earl—
Son of a Lambeth publican—— ”

when a shocked voice floated down from the gallery: “ Oh! ’Ush! don’t mike a ’obby of it, dearie!” The whole house rocked with laughter. She couldn’t go on; but she got her money all the same, for the audience “ paid ” nobly, probably the better for the mighty laugh they had enjoyed. The story got about, though, and after that the “ absent minded ” gentleman was soon allowed to rest in peace. Besides, thank Heaven, the war came to an end.



CHAPTER X

"The Duke of Killiecrankie"—Eva Moore—*The Penalty of Virtue*—*A Young Management*—"Nothing Said"—*"Love's Young Dream"*—H. V. Esmond—*A Juvenile Villain*—*Melodrama*—*The Bad Girl*—*Nightshirts*—*Theosophists*—Mrs. Annie Besant—Yvette Guilbert—*Her Art*—*In a French Hospital*—Vachel Lindsay—"The Actresses' Franchise League"—*A Successful Address*—Mrs. Pankhurst and Yvette—Christobel Pankhurst.

DOMESTIC affairs interfered with my stage life for the next year or two. I went abroad, and the next engagement of any interest that I remember, was at the Criterion Theatre in *The Duke of Killiecrankie*. It was a delightful comedy, by Captain Marshall. Weedon Grossmith and Graham Browne played the two chief men's parts, Eva Moore was the heroine—a delicious heroine, too; Jack, her baby, must have been two or three years old by then, yet Eva did not look a day more than eighteen, the prettiest eighteen possible. The Moores are a wonderful family; six talented sisters, including Madam Bertha Moore and Dame Decima; women as a sex may well be proud of owning them, but Eva, beyond being one of the finest artists, is one of the best and kindest of women.

One day I said to her that I believed that she must be about the only actress on the stage of whom no one had ever spoken ill.

"Now, that's very nice of you," she said, "but,

honestly, I've often thought that respectability may be too dearly bought."

I looked at her in astonishment; Eva Moore to say a thing like that!

"I learnt that in my first engagement," she went on. "I was with J. L. Toole, and we were playing in the Isle of Wight, at Ryde. It was Christmas time, and of course I wanted to get home for Christmas Day. To do that, I had to start after the matinée on Christmas Eve, so I got permission to miss the evening show, and started. When I arrived at the station I found the ferry-boat to Portsmouth wasn't running, so two other would-be passengers and myself hired a sailing-boat to take us over. The sea got rougher and rougher as we crossed, and before we got to Portsmouth I was looking very green indeed, and my upset 'innards' weren't improved by a rush to the station behind a hand-barrow with my luggage on it, for no cabs were to be had. The only other occupant of the railway carriage, when I at last sank into it, was a young man; he tried to enter into conversation with me, and asked me, most politely, if I was not feeling well, but being a very young and very well-brought up girl, who had been taught that to speak to a man to whom one had not been introduced was the first step on the downward path, I merely glared at him, and leaned back in my corner, hoping and praying that I might not disgrace myself by being ill before the journey's end; while that terrible train stopped at every possible—and impossible—station. At one rather

large station my young man got out, and I breathed more freely. I hoped that he had gone for good, so that even if "the worst" happened now, I should be unobserved; but back he came again, carrying a glass and a small bottle of champagne! He must have seen how miserable I looked, and he begged me most politely to take some. Faithful to my upbringing—"drink wine with a strange man, indeed!"—I coldly refused, and spent the rest of the journey with my head out of the carriage window! How I wished I hadn't been so respectable, for the wine might have averted the catastrophe. I should like to meet that young man again, and apologise."

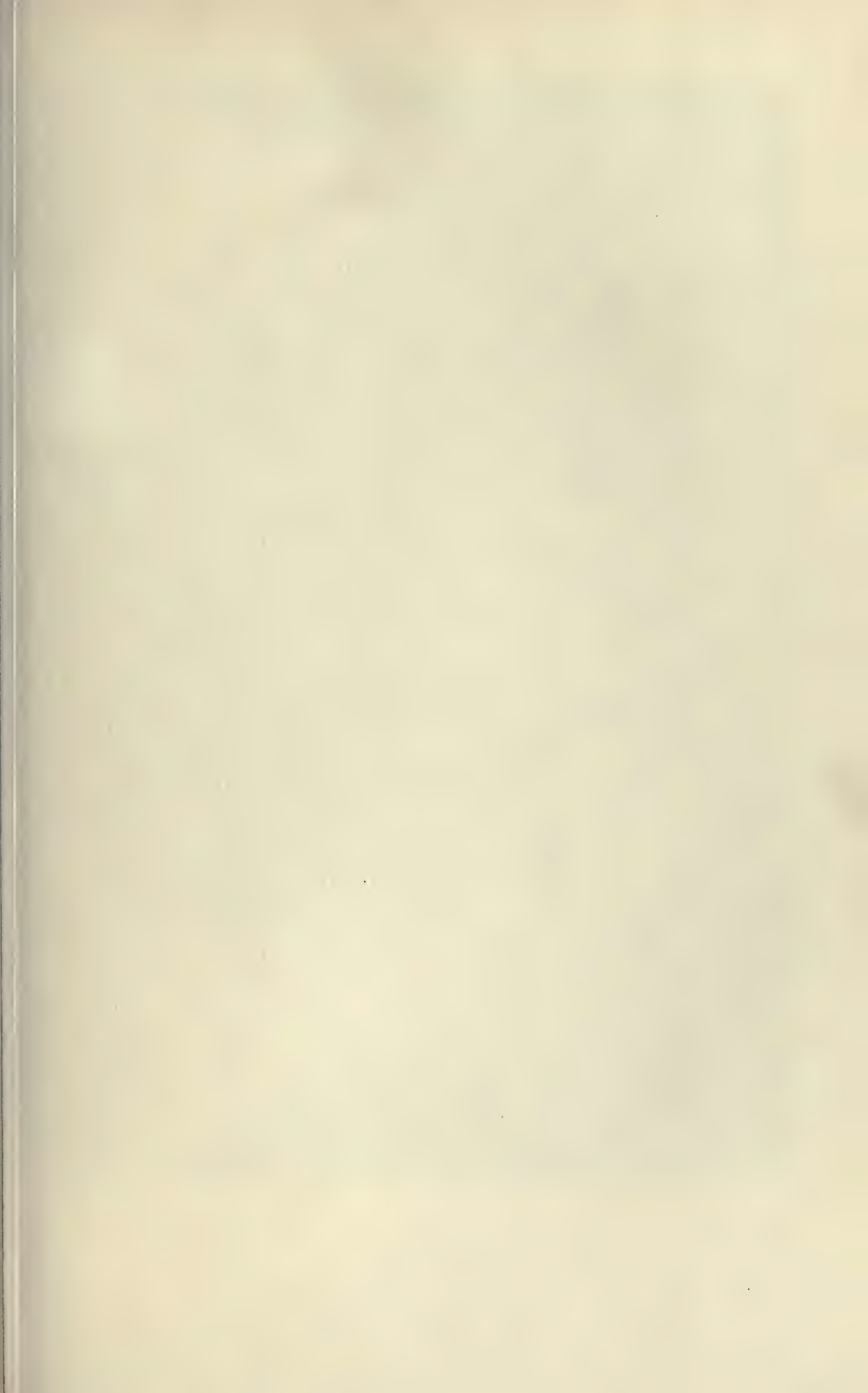
The afternoon on which Eva told me this highly moral story was a most amusing one, for we were in her delightful old Chelsea house, and she was turning out drawers full of old photographs. Some of them she gave me for your delectation (aren't the old-fashioned dresses delightful?) Among the photographs, we came upon an old diary of "Harry's" (H. V. Esmond), written when he was very young and was attracted by both Eva and another young actress called Agnes Verity, at the same time.

This was the entry:—

"Talked to Agnes all the afternoon: she was awfully nice. Took Eva home after the theatre; she gave me two tomatoes. "How happy could I be with either."

Tomatoes or girls?

Eva told me also a nice story of when she and





Scene from *The Duke of Villars*: F. M. W. C. P.

H. V. first started together in management. They were very young and very earnest, and they had, of course, talked things over together very seriously; they did want their management to be a model of what a management should be, and they had come to the conclusion that the reason that there were, frequently, so many "jars" in the harmonious working of a company was because "too much was said"—words were said in anger, the sting of which was never wiped away. Therefore did they agree that, "Whenever things occurred to upset them, they would say nothing until next day."

The tour started at the Coronet, Notting Hill, and the two first nights went splendidly, but the third night was a test for their good resolutions. To begin with, the actress who played one of the smaller parts was late, and her understudy (who did not know the words properly) had to go on for her first entrance. When the peccant lady did at last arrive, all Eva—mindful of their resolve—said, was, "Please dress as quickly as possible, and be in time for your next entrance, Miss Smith." Then, they had a very young, very hard-working stage manager, who was also very particular about his personal appearance; he worked so hard helping to move scenery during the second act that he found that bodily heat had melted his collar! Dismayed, he rushed to his dressing-room at the top of the theatre to change it, forgetful of the fact that it was time to give the warning to ring down the curtain at the end of the act! Therefore

the actors were all left standing on the stage without a word to say, while the audience, seeing something had gone wrong, stopped applauding, and began to giggle. At last Esmond strode into the prompt box and gave the signal himself, and down came the curtain. "The management" looked at each other, but still "nothing was said," except by old Jimmie Groves, who was playing the heavy father's part, and he said so much, and said it so forcibly, that he went into his dressing-room still saying it, undressed, put on his street clothes, and walked out of the theatre, quite forgetting, in his indignation, that it was only the end of the second act, and not the end of the play! The result of this forgetfulness on Groves's part was that when the time came for his entrance in the third act, and frantic calls all over the theatre elicited no response, "H.V." himself had to save the situation by going on and explaining to the actress on the stage, that he "had just seen her father outside the door," and he (the father) had said that "he would never consent to his daughter's marriage; he would sooner see her lying dead before him in her coffin," etc., etc., and all the rest of the things that Groves ought to have said, if he had been there. It was clever of H. V. to do it, but the poor actress must have thought that her young manager had gone raving mad. Still, "nothing was said!" Then, at the very end of the play, the stage manager was so upset at all the various contretemps, and so anxious not to repeat the error of the second act that he gave the warning bell for the curtain too soon,

and down came the curtain before the hero and heroine had had time for the final fall into each other's arms! Then—and only then—did Harry turn to Eva and remark,—

“I think it is time *some* one said *something*.”

(What he said she did not relate.)

And there was a sequel to this chapter of accidents. The next day Eva, as manageress, felt that she really ought to speak—calmly, and in a dignified and kindly manner, but still *speak*—to the erring actress who had been late.

“What made you so late last night, Miss Smith?” she inquired.

“Oh, I'm very sorry, Miss Moore,” replied Miss Smith, somewhat confused, “but—but I was having tea, and my watch stopped.”

Eva felt that this was really just a little too thin as an excuse.

“Your watch stopped! But surely you could have told that three or four hours had passed? You had not to be in the theatre till eight o'clock. Where were you all the time?”

“In—in Buzzard's,” stammered Miss Smith, “I—I was having tea with my fiancé.”

Eva softened—she had been there herself! “Well, there is no harm in that, of course,” she said, then remembering her managerial rôle, added firmly, “But I really must ask, Miss Smith, that in future you do not allow ‘Love's young dream’ to interfere with business.”

And then, to her utter surprise, Miss Smith burst out crying, declaring that she had never

been so insulted in her life! "We were in the shop the whole time," she sobbed.

"Now, what on earth did she think I was suggesting?" questioned Eva, when telling this tale.

H. V. Esmond started his stage career at about the age of fourteen, I believe, and played villains in melodrama at fifteen! I have a photo of him at that age, playing in *The Stranglers of Paris*, wearing a gray beard, and kneeling beside the corpse of his murdered daughter. This is what he is saying:—

"Let me but catch the villain who hath done this wrong, and I will force him to vomit up his ill-gotten gains, like a leech upon a plate of salt."

Isn't that gorgeous? I think that for genuine humour a real Surrey-side melodrama is hard to beat. One gets such delicious lines sometimes. I once played in an Irish drama in which the hero said:—

"The blade of grass that your foot has crushed is worth my whole body." A poetical hero, you will observe. The audience simply loved him, and no wonder—for he was young, handsome, and—Robert Loraine! That same hero's part was played in America by a very popular Irish-American star. The audiences in outlying theatres loved him so much that they used not only to shower flowers upon him, but vegetables, and such like gifts in kind. Also, because he possessed a fine tenor voice, he introduced into the play several charming, but modern Irish songs, such as "Father O'Flynn,"

and "Ballyhooley." The period of the play was the rising of '98, but what did a mere matter of date count in a really successful melodrama.

But, mind you, melodrama must be written seriously: it is no good attempting to write it with your tongue in your cheek; it is only absolute sincerity which carries it through. Herbert Grimwood, an old Bensonian, and a fine actor, once read me a drama he had written, which, he declared, was going to make his fortune—and would you believe it? though he had packed it full of every possible thrill—the hero rescued the heroine from runaway horses and motor-cars; the little child (in nightdress) prayed to "dear God that darling mummy would come back" (darling mummy having basely deserted the aforesaid child and taken to a "life of sin"); the same child sang *Home Sweet Home* in English in a "haunt of gilded vice" in Paris, thereby converting all the gay demi-mondaines present, and turning them from the error of their ways; there were railway accidents, avalanches, fires, everything in fact happened that could happen, and yet not a single manager could be induced to accept the play!

That was because Grimwood, not being convinced himself, was unable to convince others that such things can be.

Why, I wonder, does the villainess of melodrama always smoke cigarettes? (and seldom as if she really liked them), though, to be sure, I remember in the old Bensonian days, that when *The Corsican*

Brothers was put up, and we all had to take the parts of "Fy-Fys," our only idea of characterisation was to put on a little extra rouge, smoke cigarettes, and sit on tables. Abandoned hussies that we were!

Then, of course, the heroine must be so very, very good. One of the most delightful melodramas I ever saw was *The Bad Girl of the Family*, and, being the heroine, that Bad Girl was really better than any human girl could be; her only "vice" was, that she once joined in a pillow fight in a shop girls' dormitory—and she *had* to do that, poor thing, because it made such an effective poster—besides, I'm sure that the girls taking part in the fight had all their clothes on underneath their nightgowns, and the nightgowns themselves were the most modest of garments.

There was another night-wear scene in the same play which gave every one enormous pleasure, for an elderly man pattered across the stage with bare feet, wearing a nightshirt. The audience shouted with joy! Why are night-shirts always so humorous? They are, though. Years later, when I was visiting in India, I stayed some weeks at the Theosophist headquarters at Adyar, Madras. The women residents there wore bare feet (beauty permitting), and whatever white garment seemed good and sufficient unto them: Greek robe, cotton frock, or what not; but some of the men, as well as the bare feet, wore long nightshirts—yes, really—and I never shall forget my surprise when one of them whom I had known at Adyar

as a thin, bearded man wearing a nightshirt, and living on about two grains of rice a day, came to call on me in London on the outbreak of the war, in the uniform of the Guards, with moustache complete. He had rejoined his old regiment, and soon after fell at the front. The rice diet had not undermined his courage.

Please do not think that I want to laugh at Theosophists; they were very kind to me, and I remember with pleasure those days at Adyar. The white-robed listeners at the lectures in the moonlight on the roof, the hard rustling of the palms, and the sound of the surf on the beach. My room was not within the aura of Mrs. Annie Besant: that would probably have been considered too great a privilege, but I often met her—white-haired, white-robed, with wonderfully beautiful hands—she was always received with almost Eastern reverence by the real Theosophists, both European and native. It was a very interesting—very mystic, I think, is the best word—atmosphere, where anything might happen. Sleeping on the roof, too, was a joy, watching the stars till one fell asleep, safely tucked in by a mosquito curtain (nothing gives one such a feeling of security as a mosquito curtain), and to be wakened by the sun in the morning, with only just time for tea, toast, two oranges and a banana (*always* two oranges and a banana in India) before running indoors out of the heat.

Oh! dear, I seem to have strayed a long way from melodrama. Yes, it certainly does me good

to see one, sometimes, and to sit and chuckle, and squeal with joy at its unconscious humour.

Do you squeak and giggle when a thing amuses you? "Chortle," I believe, is the right word. I do, terribly. At Yvette Guilbert's recitals, for instance, I should become a perfect nuisance to other people if it were not that the whole audience (whether they understand French or no) are behaving in much the same way. It matters not how you feel beforehand, if that Sorceress wants you either to laugh or weep, you must do it; whether it is done quietly or obviously, is a matter of temperament.

If—unfortunately for yourself—you do not know this by experience, then figure to yourself a not-young woman (forgive me, Yvette, for thinking of years in connection with you) with marvellous red hair, of a colour that never was before on land or sea, with hands and arms that are the most beautiful and expressive things in the whole world—and it is only if you look at them closely and in cold blood that you realise that they are really only ordinary hands and arms after all; and a face that is not just a face, but an expression—radiantly lovely, or terrible and ugly—as the soul within desires. Imagine this figure, draped in rich draperies, or dressed in some period-dress, standing in the most ordinary of modern halls, on a platform with a grand piano at one side and with a background of ugly green curtains and mosaics of angels! And in spite of all that, you will see *The Crucifixion*, the arms outstretched, the droop of the Divine



H. V. Esmond in *The Strangers of Paris*, at the age of 15.

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head. You will see a woman in labour, and yet beautiful, as the Blessed Mary goes from door to door of the inns of Bethlehem that will not take her in. You will see the naughtiest of little French marquises telling of husband and lover. You will see an apache being guillotined. You will see the eternal feminine, waltzing to the strains of an old-fashioned waltz, and smoking a cigarette. You will see them all—just as Yvette sings to you about them. Sings, with no voice to speak of, but with what perfect artistry.

Oh! yes, and you will see, what perhaps I love best of all: a French peasant woman thumping resoundingly upon the fat stomach which holds the good wine, as she dances heavily, yet so joyously, round the stage and sings to you of “La Terre,” and the vine, and the tending and treading of it.

Yvette tells a sad little story about this song, and if you can hear her tell it without wanting to cry, I pity you. During the war she was asked to go and sing at a French hospital; on arriving in the ward she looked round and thought: “But these are not *les blessés*—they can see, they have no wounds, why are they here?” Then she saw that they all held little slates, and guessed how it was: they were all deaf—shell-shocked men—and she was to sing to them as an experiment. To deaf ears then she sang “La Terre,” and at the end not one of the men but had guessed the subject correctly and written it on their slates; the gestures, more than that—the atmosphere—was so unmistakable.

Do I bore you with my rhapsodies about Yvette? But to me Yvette Guilbert will always be *the* supreme artist of all I have ever heard, as well as—I am proud and honoured to say it—one of the truest, dearest of friends.

Strangely enough, another artist who gives me just that effect of “seeing,” though, of course, in a lesser degree, is Vachel Lindsay, the American poet; a quite ordinary-looking young man—no, that is not true—with a face of such expression, no one can be ordinary, but not in any way handsome. Standing on a plain platform, with nothing on it whatever, except Mr. St. John Ervine as chairman (if Mr. Ervine will forgive me for alluding to him as a “thing”), with his wonderful half singing, half chanting, and by sheer force of sincerity and magnetism, he can carry you away into a new world,

“Wrapped up from place and time,”

in the same way that Yvette Guilbert does

The first time that I came into close touch with Madame Guilbert was in connection with Women’s Suffrage work. She has always been a staunch feminist. At one dinner at which I first had the joy of meeting her, I heard her protest with her own inimitable gestures: “The heart of the woman, it beats with dignity in her breast, but man’s?”—(a shrug of the shoulders)—“in his pyjamas.”

At this time “The Actress’s Franchise League,” a quite useful branch of the movement, though

perhaps more ornamental than militant, was working to spread the cause (then in its comparatively early days) socially and in the Press; I was deputed to ask Yvette Guilbert if she would speak for us at a meeting. Like the kind woman she is, she consented; of course, stipulating that she must speak in French. A duchess was at once secured to take the chair, the manager of the Piccadilly Hotel willingly lent his largest room. There was a run on the tickets, lots of "useful" people were there, and quite a number of the Press—photographers, etc. It was a most successful and enjoyable afternoon, and really advanced the cause. There was only one tiny drawback—my French is very bad—Madame's English, though adorable, is not good, so she had misunderstood my request! She thought that "The Actress Franchise League" was a society for helping and clothing the poorer members of the profession! (Such a Society does, of course, exist: the "Ladies' Theatrical Guild"), and she made a witty and delicious speech, telling us about a charity of that sort which she herself ran in Paris, begging us for second-hand clothes, and advising us to spend *un petit sou* more than we *ought* to on dress, in order not only to please *les Messieurs*, but to have more old clothes to send to our poor sisters.

Perhaps it was not exactly "Suffrage," but it was so delightful that it did not matter one bit. Every one enjoyed it, and gave freely to the collection—both those who understood and those who did not.

I took Mrs. Pankhurst to call on Madame Guilbert a few days later, a very interesting meeting between two interesting women.

It is strange, looking back, to remember how hard we worked to gain the Franchise, and how, when it came, our thoughts of triumph were swallowed up by the pain and anxiety of the war. I never was brave enough to be a militant (and what cause was ever carried forward yet except by its fanatics?), but I used to try a little public speaking, of a more or less feeble sort, and was generally most kindly received by the audience. (Actresses had the pull there.) I remember one day, though, I tried to speak in an enormous Drill Hall somewhere in North London, and met with so many interruptions that I could not hold the audience one bit. Christobel Pankhurst was the chairwoman, and she whispered a hasty "Sit down, I'll take it on." And "take it on" she did, and talked for a solid hour, though not one word of what she said was audible to any one, for the moment she rose, the men in the audience started singing, and her voice was drowned by a reiteration of the request, "Put me Among the Girls."



Madame Yvette Guilbert's latest photo by Nickolas Murray. *To face page 160.*
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CHAPTER XI

"The Weather Hen"—H. Granville-Barker—*A Disappointment*—Producer and Author—Edward Knoblock—Haddon Chambers—Sir Charles Hawtrey—*Courtesy and Kindness*—Miss Lottie Venne—*Exact Production*—Sir James Barrie—Mr. Cyril Maude—Hubert Henry Davies—*Author and Comedian*—Cold Comfort.

ANOTHER interesting engagement that I had about this time was in a play called *The Weather Hen*, by Hartley Granville-Barker. I think that it was actually the first play that Barker ever wrote; certainly it was the first to be put on, and as he was then only about twenty-one, even he could hardly have written many before that. It was a very interesting play, about the eternal sex triangle, and took what then was considered an advanced view of sex matters.

It is possible that his views may have been a little young; at his mature age one would hardly expect anything else, but I do not remember that they were, and I know that it was a brilliantly clever play, both in construction and dialogue. I admired it immensely.

The "*Weather Hen*" was, of course, the heroine (beautifully played by Madge McIntosh), who swayed round with every wind, first deciding that she had the right to live her own life and leave an utterly despicable husband (a dramatist, by the way, and a vividly drawn character) and go away

with her lover, and then returning home again under the influence of convention and pathetic parents. I hope that Mr. Granville-Barker will forgive me this very bald version of his plot, but I do not think the play was ever published, and it is some years ago since I played in it!

It was put up by Madge McIntosh for a run (after a successful special matinée) at the Comedy Theatre, and it was probably one of the youngest managements and the youngest authors on record to try to run a play. Unfortunately, it was the month of August, and the difficulties were too great, and the weather too hot, for the plucky young people to fight against, so we had only a few weeks' run, and that to heart-breaking business.

I remember that one night word went round at the back that a Box had been taken and *paid* for! (the boxes were generally filled, but not with paying occupants), and great excitement the news created. We were all sure that it must be an American manager, or a wealthy prospective backer coming to judge the play. In any case, it was £4 into the exchequer! and even that sum was welcome at that stage of affairs.

The curtain went up and the play proceeded, but, alas! the Box remained vacant! We were puzzled and distressed, but we learnt afterwards that it had been booked in advance for some one who thought another play was on at the Comedy, and when he arrived and found that his messenger had made an error, he demanded his money back, and our business manager felt obliged to return

it, though it must have torn his heart strings to do so.

It was a very delightful engagement this, in spite of its brevity. My part was a really effective one, no one could have failed to make good in it, "short and fat," just the sort of part actors like.

Graham Browne played the lover, and Courtney Thorpe the husband. Mary Rorke and Charles Rock, the parents, and there were several other well-known names in the cast. Granville-Barker even then was a splendid producer, with the peculiar producer's talent, which is born, not made, of making his company *see* what the part means—such a different thing to showing them "how to do it." I used to say that he could make a cat act. (He certainly made me.) But young as he was, he was very strict at rehearsals. From the stall would come his quiet voice, just as one felt one really was beginning to get a grip on the scene.

"One moment, please. What was your last line, Miss ——?"

"No, thank you," you would read from your part, wonderingly.

"Ah, I thought so. You said, 'Oh, no, thank you.' Would you mind keeping exactly to what I've written? So sorry to interrupt you. Go on, please."

And you went on, somewhat crushed—but not nastily so, the reprimand had been said too kindly for that, and he was quite right.

I have never been in one of Granville-Barker's

productions since. I wonder if he has altered much. I should think not ; and it is so blessed to find successful men *sans* swollen heads.

I heard him tell a delightful little story the other day when speaking of the ignorance of the public about behind-the-stage matters.

He was producing one of his own plays at the Court, where he was also manager. Rehearsals were at their last frantic gasp before the first night. Strong men were falling exhausted upon the stage, actresses were being revived from coma in the wings, and all the nerve strain and rush, attendant upon production, was in full swing, when a dear old lady who had known him as a boy, came up from the country and wanted to see him. She called upon his mother and said she was sure Gran. must be getting quite a great man, for she had read about his new play in the local paper, and when could she see him ? Mrs. Barker replied that she feared that to see him would be out of the question, for he was busy night and day rehearsing.

"Dear me," said the old lady, "and do they run through the thing beforehand then ?"

This is going one better than the question which so often used to be put to me, "And do you really have to paint your face, or does some one do it for you."

Another author of later years, who was the very reverse of Granville-Barker in the matter of insisting upon his exact words being said, was Edward Knoblock. He was (probably still is) the most delightful author in this respect that can be imagined. I was once rehearsing in a play of his,

and the "call" was "without books": in other words, we were expected to know our parts. I did not quite know mine, but, I knew the sense of all my speeches, so I made a dash for it, hoping to get through somehow, and after one rather long speech Mr. Knoblock called out:—

"Thank you, Miss —, 'perfectly delicious' " (or whatever the word I used was) "is exactly what a silly woman like Lady Simpkins" (the character I was representing) "*would* say when speaking of the Venus of Milo, much better than what I have written; please keep it in," and he really was not being sarcastic, and I did "keep it in." Did you ever hear of such modesty on the part of an author? He was a very kind and helpful author also, and his plays were always delightfully easy to learn, because the characters spoke so naturally.

Another author-producer who was very helpful was Haddon Chambers, and what a fine dramatist he was, and what a loss to the stage.

Mr. Hawtrey—Sir Charles now, of course—was another fine producer whom I have had the privilege of acting with. He is wonderful! He, again, possesses that power of teaching. I have seen him take a young actress, who really was not particularly clever, and teach her every sentence of her part, until she gave a quite beautiful performance. Of course, he would only trouble to do this when he saw there was promise of some kind, but he was always helpful, and such an artist. He was so easy to act with, too—gave you just the right feeling, and acted with his eyes—always

keeping them on yours when he was talking to you. (Well—except, perhaps, just now and then, when something very exceptionally attractive in one of the boxes happened to catch his eye instead of you! Remember, please, that I speak of years ago!)

Talking of acting with one's eyes, looking straight at the person one is acting with—there is a diversity of opinion on this point; some actors do not like it at all.

Oscar Asche, for one, always said that the right spot at which to look at the other actor is just above the eyebrows. Then the audience believes that you are looking direct at your *vis-à-vis*, and you are able to retain your illusion at the same time.

Lily Brayton, on the contrary, liked to be looked at—looked at direct, of course, I mean—and many arguments she and Oscar used to have on the matter. (Again I remind you that I talk of old days.)

Sir Charles Hawtrey was a most kind and courteous manager; seldom have I seen him lose his temper at rehearsal, and he never sneered. He really did consider other people's feelings. I remember once, when I was quite a beginner (beginner, at least, on the London stage), and had not at all got over my early awe of established actors, that I was in a play under his management, in which I had a little scene with Miss Lottie Venne and Mr. Kemble—two of the really first artists of the time. Mr. Hawtrey was supposed to interrupt the scene, but one night he was late in coming on, dreadfully

late—more than a minute (and a minute seems eternity for a stage wait), but Kemble and Miss Venne carried on somehow and made up a conversation until Mr. Hawtrey had been fetched from his dressing-room—he had quite forgotten his entrance! When the curtain fell he apologised most humbly for the wait.

“But,” he said, “I knew I was perfectly safe with such experienced artists on the stage as Kemble, Miss Venne, and Miss ——”

I an experienced artist! But, no doubt, he thought that not to mention my name with the others would hurt my feelings.

Do you wonder that I adored him ever after?

Miss Venne was, of course, and still is, a great joy both to listen to and watch: the way she moves on her tiny, tiny feet, or handles anything, or makes her points, is perfect artistry, and she is so delightful and amusing to meet, too, but she does not like any one else to move while she is talking on the stage!

I shall never forget the agonies I went through one night when I had a bad cold and she said to me, “You won’t use your handkerchief while I’m speaking, will you, darling? I want the audience to look at *me*, you know.”

Producers have such different methods. About that time there was a craze for a terribly exact method of production. I rather think that it came from America originally, though Mr. Boucicault had always been very strict on this point.

The whole of the stage was marked out with

chalk lines and numbered squares, and you had to stand on the exact square allotted to you for a particular speech, so that at any emotional moment when you really were worked up, you might hear:—

“Stop, stop, Miss —, you are standing in number ‘3,’ your right number is ‘4’; please begin again.”

I remember a well-known American producer rehearsing us that way, and I hated those rehearsals, though it was the only occasion on which I was fortunate enough to play in a Barrie play. He was not Sir James Barrie, O.M., then, by a very long way, but a dark, shy little man, with a delightful, kind smile, a Scottish accent, and a pipe always between his lips. He never interrupted rehearsal, but when appealed to would remove the pipe, say “Vera guid,” and replace it.

Mr. Cyril Maude was yet another manager whom it was a great pleasure to be with. I have memories of a delightful engagement with him at the old Haymarket Theatre, when he was in partnership with Mr. Frederick Harrison. Mr. Maude’s own dressing-room there was most interesting: the walls were distempered, and covered from floor to ceiling with autographs and little sketches by famous people who had been to visit him there, headed by Queen Alexandra, when Princess of Wales. The room was really amusing reading; it seemed such a pity it all had to be wasted when he left the theatre.

Another author whom I like to remember having known is Hubert Henry Davies. I was never in one

of his plays, but he was a most kind and sympathetic friend. He always reminded me of an angelic choir-boy, with his fair hair and complexion, and charming smile: no one would have guessed his age to be more than twenty-five, though he must, I think, have been about forty at that time.

One might imagine a dramatic author, with his play accepted, would be one of the happiest of mortals. To see his own creations take flesh and live before him! What could be more delightful? And so he is happy—until rehearsals begin. After a week or two of those, I have seldom known an author who did not become more or less suicidal. I speak, of course, of young authors: established ones are in a very different position (though even they are not always continuously happy during rehearsal time.) Talk about seeing one's own creations come to life! It is much more like seeing one's baby amputated before one's eyes! The necessary cuts and alterations seem so brutal and generally so wrong, to the ear of the unfortunate parent, who, having written a part from one point of view naturally finds it difficult to hear or see it from any other point whatever. All the same, it is a foolish young dramatist, as a rule, who does not submit—for the operation is generally for the child's good, as its progenitor will probably—well, let us say, possibly own, after the play has been produced.

Revue Stars and Comedians—artists drawing princely salaries of about £300 a week—are admittedly the most difficult of all for an author to

deal with; of course they require their parts specially written for them, but, even so, the mighty ones are not always satisfied. I know one brilliant young author who introduced a short and well-known quotation from Scott into the comedian's part of a revue he had written; when this point was reached at rehearsal the "Great Man" slowly read it out, then he came down to the footlights, and called across them to the author in the stalls:—

"Look here, you know, this is rot; I'll have to gag a bit here or you'll have to alter it."

"Well, you see, Mr. ——"—(the author was beginning to feel a little tired)—"they are not *my* words, they are Scott's."

"Scott, 'oo's Scott?" came the question. "Aren't *you* the author of the play?"

"Sir Walter Scott, you know. It's a quotation from his works."

"Oh! *Sir* Walter! I thought you meant the chap at the top of the Haymarket."

And the "Great Man" retired, satisfied.

Stage luck, like other luck, generally comes in lumps, with long pauses between—such long pauses, indeed, that one may even get through a lifetime without coming upon a lump worth mentioning—but a certain young dramatist whom I knew certainly appeared to have found one.

He had two plays running in London theatres at the same time, and a third play in rehearsal at another—there was luck, indeed!

Now the two plays already before the public were both of them boomed as a "Great Artistic

Success " (and actors know that that means "Wait and See"), but the rehearsals of the third were not going at all well, and the poor young dramatist, with overstrained nerves (no wonder!) was almost in despair.

One day at rehearsal, Walter Hampden—that handsome American actor—who was playing the leading part, came to him, and patting him affectionately on the back, said:—

"Don't you worry, dear lad, *this* play's going to be a success, all right. No hen can lay three bad eggs."

And he meant it so kindly, too!

CHAPTER XII

Sir Herbert Tree—Bells—Shingles—Tact—A Very Gallant Gentleman—Rudolf Besier's Story—A Charity Matinée—"Most Unfortunate"—A Week-end Party—and a clever Actress—Dignity—"Rupert of Hentzau"—Immortal—An Eccentric Comedian—"God Bless Curzon."

PROBABLY more witty stories are told about Herbert Beerbohm Tree than about any other modern actor. So much so that I hardly dare to add to their number, but it is possible that the following ones, the genuineness of which I can personally vouch for, may not be universally known.

We were rehearsing a play at His Majesty's in which, in one scene, a peal of bells had to be rung. When first tried the bells were not quite in tune, and Tree jumped to his feet with his hands over his ears, and with a wail, cried, "Oh, my God! can't we have bells that *are* bells; those bells are like eczema, they get under the skin."

Another time, speaking of an "Odol" beauty (and just then every actress who possessed good teeth was being photographed in a smile which looked as if intended to advertise the mouth wash), Tree said:—

"That woman frightens me—take her away. Her smile is like shingles—half an inch off Eternity."

(He alluded, of course, to the old superstition that if shingles meet round the patient's waist, he dies.)

Once Tree was rehearsing with a very important leading lady. He always liked to surround himself with the biggest stars available, and this actress was one of the very brightest luminaries.

Strangely enough, she had one fault: she *would* say, "She sor-r," "I sor-r," "You sor-r," etc., in fact, she sawed through every person of the tense. Sir Herbert writhed under this for some time, but at last he could stand it no longer; difficult as she was to correct, he gently drew her aside and murmured,—

"Forgive me for mentioning it, dear Miss —, but we don't pronounce the "R" in saw nowadays."

Perhaps the recollection of Sir Herbert Tree's wit is a little obscured for me by the remembrance of his kind heart. My most treasured remembrance of him is just this:—

I was invited to one of his famous lunch parties in his famous Dome Room at His Majesty's. It was a large party, to meet some foreign author, and our host's chef excelled himself. But, unfortunately for myself, I was in no mood for enjoyment; I was feeling hurt and sore, for something had wounded me very much. Sir Herbert knew this, and he went out of his way to cheer me up, trying his best to explain away the unkind thing.

His was the act of a gallant gentleman. I like to remember it.

Rudolf Besier tells the following story.

"After a delightful evening spent with Sir Herbert in the Dome, and finishing off in the small hours at the Garrick Club, while we stood on the steps together waiting for our taxis, Tree put his arm affectionately round my shoulder and said, 'My dear fellow, I don't know when I shall be able to produce that play of yours.'

"'But you haven't got a play of mine, Sir Herbert,' was my astonished reply.

"'Oh? Thank God,' and Tree disappeared into his taxi.

"And that was the last time I ever saw him," is the regretful end of the tale.

A very special charity *matinée* was once given at the St. James's. I am not sure now for what cause it was held, but I know that royalty and all the smart world were represented in front, and all the stars of the stage behind the curtain. Mr. Tree (not yet knighted) came with the others to help in the good work. He was doing a scene out of one of his own productions, in which as a king he walked about a garden and cut off the heads of tall flowers with a tall sword. I know that I ought to remember in which play this scene occurs, but I am ashamed to own that I do not, but I do know that the scene was almost a monologue for Tree, and was rather—well, to tell the truth—*very* long.

Mr. Tree, of course, brought his own prompter with him: who was a nervous little man. Tree's prompter always *was* nervous, the post was no sinecure! He stood in the prompt corner by the St. James's stage manager, and was very anxious

and worried indeed, lest everything should not work correctly for the scene.

The manager refused to be flurried. He had managed the smoothly running, hitchless mechanism of the St. James's stage for years; he had satisfied "The Chief" (as Sir George was always called by his staff and company), and a scene for another actor, however distinguished, was not going to be allowed to worry him.

"It's a quick curtain, you understand," said the nervous prompter, "a very, very quick curtain."

"That's all right," was the stolid reply, "I'll see to it; all *you* have to do is to tell me four minutes before the end of the scene, so that I can give the warning signal, and say *now*, when you want the curtain, and it'll be down in one second; don't you worry."

So the scene went on, and on, and Mr. Tree wandered about the stage, slowly soliloquising. The prompter kept his eyes glued to his book, and the stage manager stood by with his hand ready to turn on the blue light which would signal "Ready" to the men above. At last the prompter threw up one hand.

"Warn," he said, and on went the blue signal.

"All right?" queried the prompter, his eyes never leaving the book.

"Right," was the reply.

"Quick curtain, you know."

"Right."

"Quick as you can make it."

"All right." The manager was getting a little cross.

"Are you ready?" came the question after another second.

There was no reply this time; the manager merely waited.

"Now," said the prompter, "there is only one more speech."

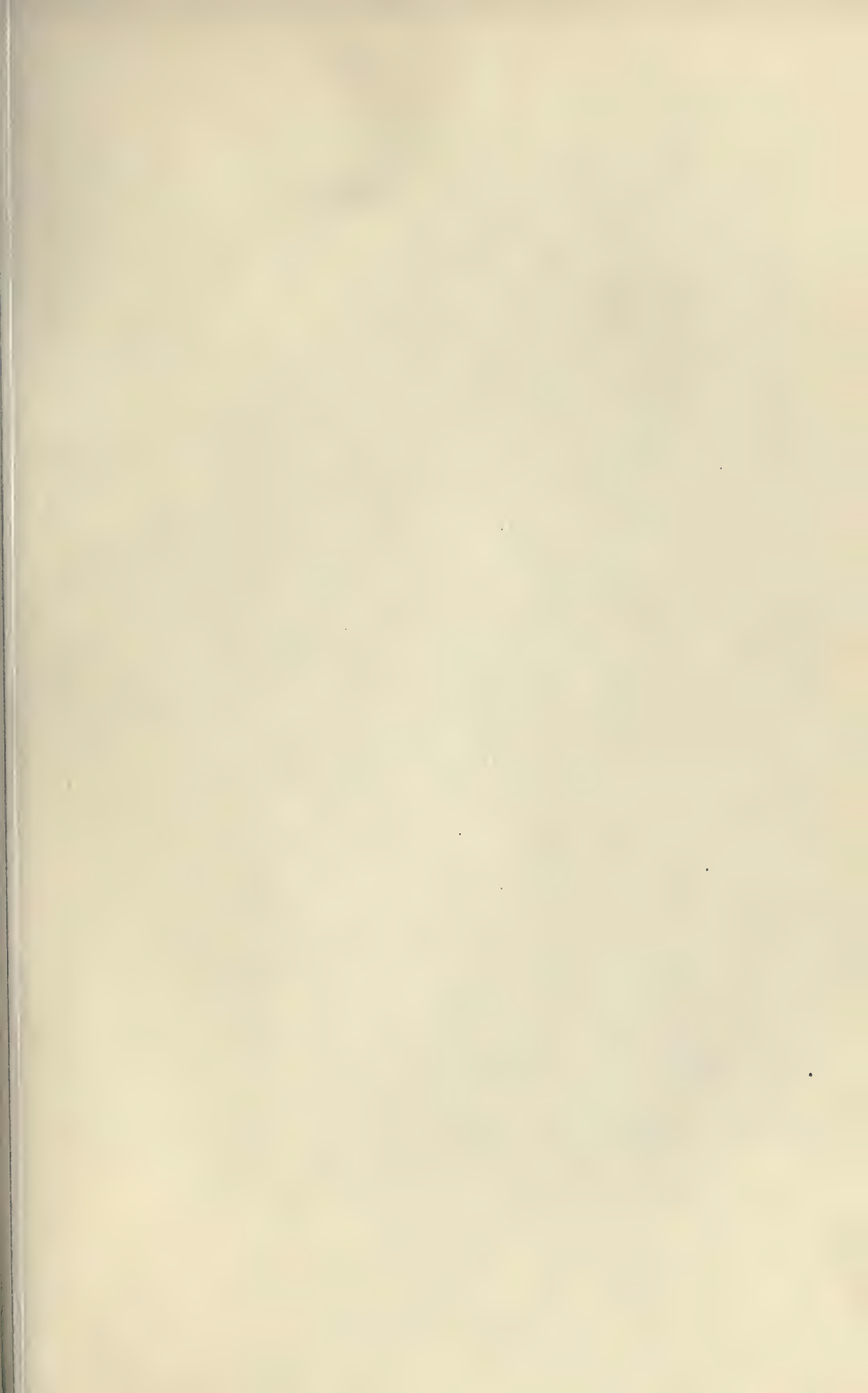
But the end of his remark came too late. "Now" had been spoken, and down with a whizz came the curtain, leaving Mr. Tree—his last lines unspoken—standing in astonishment in the middle of the stage.

Vociferous applause from the audience. Up went the curtain, down and up again—and again, for four or five calls. Tree all the while standing amazed and puzzled, and taking no notice of the plaudits. At last the curtain was allowed to remain down; the prompter threw away his book and fled from the theatre, the stage manager hurried to Mr. Tree to apologise and explain, and Sir George himself came round from his box in front to join him.

"Most unfortunate—most unfortunate!" was all that Tree said, and walked away hurt, but dignified.

Of course the stage manager got a "wiggling" from the chief then, but at the end a twinkle came into Sir George's eye, a smile to one corner of his mouth,—

"At least there is one man in the theatre who knows when he has had enough," he said.





Herbert Tree

Sir Herbert Tree, from a drawing by John S. Sargent. *To face page 177.*

I was never fortunate enough to be a member of Sir George Alexander's company; but years afterwards I was a guest at the same country house, a house which was quite celebrated for its enjoyable week-end parties, and found him a charming fellow-guest, with a delightful sense of humour. On the Saturday afternoon, soon after our arrival, I went into the library and found Sir George poring over the visitors' book. He looked at me with a laugh.

"I am just seeing," he said, "if we have been asked to a 'scrum' party, or if it is the real thing."

I am sure it must have been "the real thing."

The only other guest connected with the stage on that occasion was a very pretty, very charming young actress, and as Sir George was shortly putting on a new play, the leading girl's part in which was not yet cast, we rather suspected our delightful hostess, one of the kindest women living, of wanting to do a good turn to the actress by inviting her to meet the distinguished manager. We kept our eyes, therefore, interestedly open, but although the two were placed next to each other at dinner, beyond a pretty, shy deference and an upward look under long, long lashes, when spoken to, the actress took no notice of the great man, and made no attempt to fascinate him: instead, she concentrated all her attention, all her charm of manner, mixed with just a tiny touch of flattery, upon—Lady Alexander; and on the Monday morning, while we waited for the motors to take us to the station, the engagement for the

forthcoming production was made. Clever child! It was a most successful engagement, too.

I cannot imagine Sir George under any circumstances as anything but dignified, and yet can a man (or woman either, for that matter) look really dignified at the other end of a toy dog's lead? Sir George used to take their priceless Peke (to whom he was devoted) for its "Good-night run" every night after the theatre. One night a drunken cabby in Pont Street called out to him:—

"'Ello, Georgie boy, tiking yer 'ound for a walk?"

"He's not mine," indignantly replied Sir George, "not mine—he's my wife's."

One of the company at St. James's told me an amusing story about the dress rehearsal of *Rupert of Hentzau*, which play, you may remember, followed the *Prisoner of Zenda*, but did not equal it in success. The theatre was filled with private friends of Sir George and Lady Alexander. It was almost as important an occasion as the first night. In the last scene Rupert lay dead upon a catafalque, while the queen and all the ladies mourned around him. Of course, there was no necessity for "The Chief" to tire himself further, after his evening's exertions, by pretending to be a laid-out corpse, so his understudy, a young actor of the name of Hamilton, who bore some resemblance to Sir George, was to undertake the part of "Body," duly dressed in a duplicate uniform, and the high boots and wig of Rupert.

The catafalque was arranged so that the feet of

the corpse were towards the footlights, and the face too far away and in too much shadow for any recognition of the change to be possible. But on this night of the dress rehearsal, Sir George, standing in the wings, ready to go on for his curtain call, was completely puzzled. Was it possible! Instead of the sound of sobbing, came something that was suspiciously like tittering—not only from the mourning ladies on the stage, but, and more clearly, too—from the audience!

The soles of the boots of the dead hero on the catafalque, seen by all, bore the unmistakable figures of 3/11 in white chalk. Sydney Brough had marked them in the dressing-room before the unsuspecting Hamilton had put them on!

Rupert of Hentzau was rather a difficult play to follow, especially if one had not seen *The Prisoner of Zenda* first, and in the provinces it met with a good many small *contretemps*.

At Plymouth one night, for instance, when Colonel Sapt (played by that fine old actor, W. H. Vernon) said, in one scene:—

“I’m damned if I understand it,” a voice replied,
“I’m damned if I do, either.”

It was a dangerous line to have left in!

Another time, in a dark and mysterious scene, Vernon and Barrington-Foote, after long and silent searching, came upon the body of the king.

“The king is dead,” Foote said solemnly, and a little man in the pit, who until that moment had been sleeping peacefully, woke up, and only catching those words, piped out:—

“ I wish it was Krooger.”

(It was the time of the Boer War.)

Rehearsals usually afford scope for amusing incidents, and tiring and trying as they are, a Mummer has always a keen enough sense of humour to make the most of the comic relief.

I once heard Mr. Fred Terry tell a story about a rehearsal during his management of the old Globe Theatre. They were rehearsing the last play that he and Miss Julia Neilson put on there—the last play, in fact, to be put on at the old house at all—it was called *The Heel of Achilles* (known as “The 'Eel of Axles” to all stage hands). Now Mr. Terry has very acute powers of hearing, and not perhaps very acute powers of memory in learning a new part (none of that wonderful family are what is called Quick Studies, I believe), so any noise on the stage while he was rehearsing put him off, and none of the company were allowed to unnecessarily stand about in the wings or at the back, or speak above a whisper, when obliged by their business to be there.

They were rehearsing the last act of this play, then (a costume one), in which Mr. Terry had to die on the stage, and there was much difference of opinion between producer, author, manager, Miss Julia Neilson, and various other experts who had been invited to the rehearsal; as to the most effective way for him to do so.

He sat in a high-backed chair, his head gently fallen to one side—— “Beautiful,” said the critics, “but not quite realistic enough.”



George Alexander and H. V. Esmond in *The Ambassadors*.
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He threw his head back, turned up his eyes, and dropped his jaw——

“Realistic, certainly, but too horrible.”

And so it went on and on; Mr. Terry dying in every possible position, and failing to give satisfaction in any, while two “walk-on” gentlemen, waiting in the wings to carry off his corpse, said to each other:—

“There’s time to have *one*.”

They had one—and returned to find Mr. Terry still dying.

“Time for another—give us a call, Bill,” they whispered to the limelight man, and again they stole off. At last Mr. Terry had an inspiration which he felt certain would be effective. He threw himself into an entirely new position, and held it tensely, waiting for the applause of his critics, when a sibilant whisper reached his ear:—

“Is he dead yet, Bill?” and in scathing tones the reply:—

“No, ’e ain’t; the b——y blighter’s immortal.”

There is a certain eccentric comedian, whose name I must not mention, because he would not like it, with whom I once had a most enjoyable tour.

He was (and is) a delightful, genial man, and he took the utmost pleasure in chatting to and making friends with every one: company, stage hands, railway porters—he knew all their personal affairs, and sympathised with them all, and he had no hesitation, whatever, in trying to make friends with perfect strangers.

One Sunday morning, while waiting for the train on the Brighton platform, he went up, with his usual breezy charm to a rather sullen-looking young man, and the following conversation took place.

Comedian : Jolly day, isn't it ?

Stranger : Um.

Comedian : Delightful place, Brighton, delightful—you live here ?

Stranger : Yus.

Comedian : Ah! lucky fellow—wish I did. Magnificent air—so healthy. I wonder, now! Are you married ?

Stranger : Yus.

Comedian : That's good, that's good. I like to hear that. Any—er—little tiny tots now ? Any family ?

Stranger (with a look) : No, there ain't, we was only married this morning.

Comedian : Well! well! After all, we live in a rapid age.

And he went smilingly away to his train.

On that same tour we were playing at Worthing. Mr. Frank Curzon was the lessee and manager of the theatre. One of the young men of the company had a birthday, so after the show he and some friends hurried round to the front of the house to celebrate before the bars closed.

A charming young lady served them.

"Won't you join us, miss?" said the actor.

"Thanks." She poured out an extra glass, and the young man put down the money for the

lot. To his surprise, she pushed it back, saying:—

“Not at all. We always drink Mr. Curzon’s health before closing.” Then, raising her glass:—

“God bless Curzon,” she said.

I doubt if Mr. Curzon knew of the source of that particular blessing, but obviously it has reached him.



CHAPTER XIII

Allan Aynesworth, Raconteur—Lyn Harding counters—Norman M'Kinnel and the Clock—Otho Stuart—H. G. Wells—George Bernard Shaw—Amateur Societies—"Windsor Strollers"—The Ober-Ammergau Players—Dramatic Critics—and a Poet.

I CANNOT remember the exact order of my engagements after this, and I kept no diary, but I know that it was at about this time that I had the pleasure of being in the same company as Allan Aynesworth: "Tony," as his friends called him—and he was the very best and wittiest raconteur that I have ever met.

The play for which we were both engaged was being rehearsed out of London, because the bulk of the company were playing in another play on tour, and the new production was to have the addition of some "specially engaged" London actors, namely ourselves.

The long railway journeys, and the living in country hotels, with nothing to do at night (for we were not acting), would have been dreadfully tiring had it not been for "Tony"; as it was, even provincial hotel meals were a joy, he kept us all so amused by his wit, and the stories he used to tell. Aynesworth was always a very handsome man, tall, and with a delightful manner, and extremely attractive to women (whom, I may say, he on his part by no means disliked); it was only

natural, therefore, that some of his stories—quite a good few, in fact—should touch upon affairs of the heart: conquests, and such like, though they were told without any bragging, and just as wittily if the laugh in them happened to be against himself.

Another of the specially engaged actors for the new play was Lyn Harding, and such a contrast he seemed to “Tony!” About the same height and size, but dark where Aynesworth was fair, quiet where he was witty, and at first seeming, a little dull and heavy, while Aynesworth was one polished brilliance.

One night at dinner, after “Tony” had been telling us some more than usually amusing anecdote—“with a lady in it”—Lyn Harding began quite gravely.

“I remember one time that I was in India”—(we had no idea that he had ever been there, but no matter!)—“I was walking along a street in the native quarter; high walls were on either side of me, overhung with flowering trees, and the few windows that were to be seen were closely barred, for the Maharaja’s Zenana lived on the other side. Suddenly, as I walked along, a white hand waved to me through the bars of one of the windows, and soon after a little door below it opened, some one seized my wrist, and I was hastily dragged through.

“I made no resistance; the white hand had fascinated me. I felt that unless I could see the owner of it, life would not be worth living, so I followed my guide through dark and tortuous

passages, until I was shown into a room where the most beautiful woman I had ever seen lay upon a bed of freshly-curled lettuce leaves——” A shout of laughter from Aynesworth stopped him, for so seriously had he told the story, and so amazed were we at such an adventure befalling Lyn Harding, that it wasn't till he came to the “curled lettuce leaves” that we realised he was pulling Tony's leg. After that we knew better than to think Lyn Harding dull.

Norman M'Kinnel, also, was one of the wittiest and most entertaining of men, and could generally be relied upon to keep the table in a roar.

Once when I was living in a tiny flat with my sister, we decided to ask “Mac” to Sunday night's dinner. Certainly, the day-servant refused to come in at all on Sundays, but “she would leave the food all ready to be hotted up, so *that* was all right.” I was very tired on the Saturday night, and a clock which I had just bought (the only one going in the flat) annoyed me and kept me awake by its loud ticking, so I got up, wrapped a silk stocking round it, then went back to bed and slept.

Next morning when I woke, I unwrapped my clock quickly; I saw that it was very late, so I called my sister, and we had “brunch” (lunch and breakfast combined), then at four o'clock, as we were getting afternoon tea, M'Kinnel arrived. “Come for tea as well as dinner,” we thought, “how nice of him.” But we were just a little surprised, and we were still more surprised when

he finished up all the cakes and sandwiches, and even then took potted meat with his bread and butter. Time seemed to hang a little heavily after that: he was not just as brilliant as usual, and I was glad when at last I could say:—

“Now, if you will excuse me, I will go and see about the dinner.”

“Dinner!” he said. “Dinner? Haven’t we had it? Do you know what time it is?”

He pulled out his watch, and it was half-past nine! The hands of the clock had been stopped by the stocking at 12 p.m., they moved again when I unwrapped it, only *then* it happened to be four o’clock instead of twelve: we had slept sixteen hours, and poor Mac, arriving for eight o’clock dinner, was given tea and potted meat! No wonder he wasn’t merry! He took no more risks after that, but when we had finished laughing, drove us off to a real dinner at the Pall Mall.

Otho Stuart was another very amusing raconteur. He had left the Benson company before I joined it, but he had played the leads with them for a long time, and has never lost his love for his old company. He was the original Ferdinand in their production of *The Tempest*, and Oberon in *The Dream*.

He used often to come and visit the company in my time, and was very popular with them. He was the leading man then with the well-known and dramatic actress, Mrs. Bernard Bere.

They were playing a dramatisation of the novel, *As in a Looking-Glass*, and had made a big hit with it. Now Mrs. Bernard Bere’s smile was beautiful,

and she showed her teeth a good deal. Unfortunately, one of the front ones had been broken, and a false one was screwed on to the stump in its place. Probably dentistry work was not as good twenty years ago as it is now, any way this is what happened:—

The scene of *As in a Looking-Glass* is at Monte Carlo, and at the end of the third act the heroine (Mrs. B. B.) is seen seated, with her lover (Otho Stuart) kneeling by her side, and passionately pleading. Idly she reaches out her hand and takes up a flower from the table by her. (It is a flower worn by another lover, the night before, when he had killed himself; she has kept it, of course, for luck at the tables). Idly she puts the flower to her lips, then, realising what it is, throws it away with a wild, blood-curdling shriek of, "The Suicide's Flower," and, turning, throws herself into the arms of her kneeling lover, saying, "Take me, take me, Edward! (or Algernon, or Percy, or whatever his name was), I am yours——"

(Curtain)

That is how it should have gone, but one night the power of her shriek was such that the attached tooth became dislodged, and all the poor woman could do was to fall into Otho's arms, mumbling something unintelligible through closed lips, while the stage manager stood quietly in his corner, quite oblivious of the tragedy, waiting to *hear* the words of the cue—which did not come—for ringing down the curtain.

Of course, Stuart had lots of Benson stories, too,



Norman M'Kinnel.

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almost as many as Lady Benson! He declared that once, when he was playing Ferdinand in *The Tempest*, the extra ballet brought on and danced round a large funeral wreath on a stick! The mother of one of them had just died, and they had subscribed for this wreath as a token of sympathy with their companion, only, when the wreath was sent to the theatre, on the night before the funeral, they thought it a shame it should not be properly seen, before being buried, so took it on to the stage.

I do hate those wired and tortured flowers! Perhaps for a funeral they may be all right, it is a matter of taste, but those offerings of wired flowers which, when I was a young girl, it was the fashion for our "Beaux" to send us before dances and such festivities, were dreadful. They called themselves "Sprays," but were much more like sections of a funeral wreath, and they reached from shoulder to waist, or even longer, according to the degree of devotion of the sender! They weighed pounds, they nearly always spoilt one's dress, and at the end of the dance, looked a loathsome mass of wire and mangled flowers (and that, please note, without any additional assistance from Bunny Hug or Backstairs), and yet, of course, no self-respecting girl in those days could appear without one.

When on tour, actors—particularly if they are well known—are often asked to stay with friends: in the case of those rehearsals I have been speaking of, in which Alan Aynesworth and Lyn Harding took part, we all had more invitations than we cared to accept. On the whole, I never found

it very successful to stay with friends while acting—actors' hours are so different from other people's, for one thing, and I hated to exchange the freedom of theatrical lodgings for even such splendour as that which I once heard William Nicholson describe as "a house where one is obliged to wear snow shoes to avoid sinking into the pile of the carpet, and where even luxury has lost her lap," and at that he drew a delicious little picture of a seated Luxury with an inclined plane of fat from chin to knee.

That is the kind of wit which makes one feel happy, and warms the heart like a glass of old port, but—so sadly often—to meet celebrities only leads to disillusionment.

A little while ago one of our most brilliant young women-writers, the lion—or lioness—of an entire season, wished to meet an, equally celebrated and brilliant young actor. A lunch was therefore arranged; they were placed next to each other, and while the rest of the guests, while pretending to be engrossed in their own conversations, listened with half an ear, and as much (or rather more) attention than good manners warranted, hoping, no doubt, to pick up a "sparkling something" for retailment later—the following exchange of wit took place:—

She (after a long silence): Er—have you been here long?"

He (after another pause): Er—er—what did you say?

And that was absolutely all!

I once had the honour of meeting Mr. H. G. Wells—a younger and oh! so different a Mr. Wells!

We were introduced. I admired his last book. He said,—

“Dear lady, after all the attacks of the critics your words are comfort. I long to lay my head upon your breast.”

Like most actresses, I always wished to play in a Shaw play—and I never had the chance to do so; but I once did have the privilege of a talk with Mr. Shaw, and that occasion certainly was not one of disillusion.

We talked of the Marriage Laws. I must have been greatly daring that night, for I actually argued with him! (No, it was not “after dinner,” but at a reception, with only cold teetotal drinks, so I have not even that excuse.) I said I feared that any considerable relaxation of the present law might act disadvantageously for women, especially for middle-aged ones with families, who were hardly likely to attract, or desire to attract, a second husband, if the law compelled them to lose the first; and that “it would be unfair for a woman—who had spent her youth and looks on one man—if the man could leave her without difficulty when a more attractive and younger girl came along.”

G. B. S. annihilated me, as I deserved, with a crushing rejoinder about “Property.”

“When women cease to look upon their husbands as their property, like a lap-dog or a chair,” he said,

"there will be less talk of loss. It was a matter of economics."

"Aren't you just a little hard on women, Mr. Shaw?" I asked.

Then, indeed, it was a worm that I felt, for he gave me one look, and said sharply,—

"How dare you say a thing like that?"

He was not angry afterwards, but quite kind, and I knew what a fool-remark I had made; for, of course, he is not hard on women, but full of sympathy and understanding for them.

A friend of Mr. Shaw's told me the following story:—

Long ago, when he (G. B. S.) was the dramatic critic of a certain paper, some important director, or member of the management, wrote to him, requesting that in his dramatic notice of a forthcoming play, favourable mention should be made of a certain little lady in whom the writer was interested. This actress being one of the "head and tail" variety, namely, with a pretty face and a pretty leg, but with no further dramatic talent, Mr. Shaw's reply was,—

"Am I a prostitute or are you?"

I believe that his connection with the paper ceased soon after.

Producing plays for amateurs was quite a profitable "fill in" for an actress out of work, in my time; I expect that it is so still, for there are so many good amateur societies—besides the not-quite-amateur, not-quite-professional" guilds and cults and the like, which work for "Brightening

England," and "Raising the Drama," and splendid high-brow things of that sort.

A wicked boy of my acquaintance described these societies as "Banded together for the purpose of pointing out priceless little bits of colour to each other." (Most unfair. They really do good work!)

Also I like the story (I hope you don't know it already) of a performance given by the "Windsor Strollers."

The hero and heroine "dried up" completely in a love scene, and there was an awful silence.

"The moon is up," whispered the prompter from his corner, but no one took the prompt.

"The moon is up," came again the voice, and still the lovers stood gazing around, despairingly for help.

"The moon is up," and the voice was insistent and very audible to the audience; then still louder:—

"The—moon—is—up."

The hero turned towards the corner savagely:—

"Yes, I know, I know," he shouted, "but who *says* it!"

I don't know if the Ober-Ammergau players can quite come under the heading of "amateurs," they are such specialists, but I saw the last performance that was given there before the war, in 1912. Very impressive and beautiful it was. The sincerity of the players, alone, would have made it impressive; but, oh! it was long! To be awakened at six o'clock by all the bells and clocks in the town, to rush to the theatre (a sort of big hall with

an open roof) for the performance, after a hurried cup of coffee, and to sit there on a hard bench with no back to it, and no room for one's knees, the live-long day, with one interval only at twelve o'clock for lunch, requires considerable devotion to art—and as the afternoon wore on I found myself getting very sleepy. When it was all over, and we came from two thousand years ago out into the world of to-day, there above us was the first Zeppelin I had ever seen: "The Parsifal," come to greet the visitors to Ober-Ammergau. It looked beautiful; and I refrain from the obvious *cliché* about my next view of a Zep.

Some of the acting was remarkable—all sincere. Judas was very fine, and the Madonna a beautiful girl; but it seemed so strange to see the actors wearing their costumes out of doors (they wear them for the whole week, walking about the streets), and still more so to see Christ (Anton Lang) driving in a car with an American lady, or St. John being treated to a glass of beer by an admirer. There were a great many Americans there that year, and they literally mobbed the actors for their signatures and picture post cards.

I heard a good deal of gossip in a neighbouring town about the goings on of some of the lady visitors and the principal actors, with suggestions of much champagne; we will hope it was not true—probably it was not. It might be a novel experience, but hardly a pretty one, to flirt with a peasant in the guise of a Biblical character.

I am afraid that I have been drifting towards

dramatic criticism, a thing which I should never venture to do. The training of a lifetime (a stage lifetime) has instilled into me the greatest respect for dramatic critics. We Mummers know so well that they can more or less make or break us. This will probably be indignantly denied, but it is true.

Yes, I have the greatest respect for dramatic critics—they are, as a rule, kind-hearted and generally willing to give play or artist the “benefit of the doubt”; indeed, I once heard one of them say, “Dear old —, such a dear fellow! we must give him a helping hand,” so he folded his white gloves and slept through the performance, and a beautiful notice appeared in his paper the next day.

A little while ago a famous minor poet wrote a poem and sent it to a well-known weekly, and, of course, it was at once accepted. Unfortunately, when the issue which contained the poem came out, the poet found his offspring, *not* in the place of honour, but printed on the reverse side of the page devoted to theatrical criticism, and he wrote indignantly to the editor, saying that “He refused to be published on the back”—well, yes, *back*, though he was slightly more specific—“of Solomon Sparrow.”

CHAPTER XIV

An Apology to all Americans—American Hospitality—Three Impressions of America—"Old Glory"—An Invitation—William Brady—A Clam-bake—Dust—Clam and Pumpkin Pie—A Bumping Race—The Results—My Second Impression—and Third—Lunch—Newspapers—"No Smoking Allowed"—Mrs. Patrick Campbell's way out—More Contradictions—Reversion to Type—Family Life—Heat and Cold—Washington—American Chivalry and Sentiment—"Thinking of their Mothers"—Noise—A Haven of Silence.

I WRITE about America with diffidence, and offer my humble apology to any Americans who may happen to come across these recollections, should it seem to them that I did not properly appreciate their country.

"How can any one venture an opinion upon America," they may say, "after only a twelve months' stay there? A woman, too, *petite dame de petite ville*, who, as she herself owns, spent most of her time touring with theatrical companies": and they will be quite right in their condemnation. Moreover, I own frankly that my lack of enthusiasm was largely my own fault, for I went there depressed and unhappy and with a jaundiced eye, which would have made the Garden of Eden itself look yellow. One is no fair judge of anything under such conditions, and the bigness of America only increased my sense of loneliness and self-pity. There! Having made my confession before

committing the crime, I trust that I may be forgiven.

It seemed to me that American actors and actresses were not quite such "society" people as they were in England; in fact, there was a distinct difference; the stage folk there were more stagey, more professional, more—if I may use the word in its wrong sense—insular, than with us; they mixed less in general society; but all the same (and I want to record it with emphasis), both in New York and in every other town in which I stayed long enough to present my introductions, the hospitality and kindness that I met with was amazing.

On the point of hospitality I do think that Americans beat other nations completely, and the great trinity of impressions which I gathered of America is, *First and Foremost*, the hospitality of its people, *Second*, their glorious disregard of human life, and *Third*, the fact that "time is money, and don't you forget it." Of course, waving over all this is "Old Glory." It meets your eye, waking, the first morning, when, anchored off Long Island, you realise that at last you are in America, and never afterwards do you get away from it. How suggestive of America that flag is! Stars—little discs, suggesting money, and blue and white stripes—clear and decided, knowing their own mind and always looking new. Even the splendid old flags of the war of the North and South, which hang in the hall of the Old Senate House at Philadelphia (through which hall no man may ever pass with

his hat on), stained by blood and battle as they are, still retain somehow that look of clearness and newness.

As for hospitality—a welcome example of it met us—(the little party of English actors)—almost before we had landed. For on the very edge of the dock we were met by an express messenger with notes of welcome from William Brady, the manager whom we had come out to join: a most kind and charming attention on his part. By the way, those express messenger boys were ubiquitous and indispensable in New York City; one actress I knew out there always rang up on the 'phone for one of them to come round and fasten her dress (dresses were all fastened down the back in those days), as she had no maid of her own.

As well as the note of welcome from Brady on landing, there was the note of hospitality—also from him—for we were invited to join a Clam-bake party at New Jersey the next day (a Sunday).

Oh! that Clam-bake! It was my first experience of America, remember, and besides our host and his wife, managers, and stars, and authors, and all sorts of theatrical notabilities were there. Mr. Brady was a big florid man, rough, and a little fierce. I believe many of his artists were afraid of him, but, personally, I always found him kind. He had been very interested in prize fighting: I rather think that he had been a professional boxer himself at one time, and nowadays I believe he has more or less given up the legitimate stage and is making millions in movies; but in my time he

was the manager of several theatrical companies, and had many plays, both on the road and in New York. His wife, Miss Grace George, was an extremely pretty woman of the golden-haired, blue-eyed type, and a good actress; she found me "terribly English," she said, but that is another story.

For the Clam-bake we drove to New Jersey in private motor-cars—automobiles, I mean (Americans always call them automobiles—correct, but long!), and, of course, being managers, stars, etc., we had the largest and most expensive cars. After crossing the ferry, our way was over roads of the most horrible red sand I ever saw; we had been warned about that sand, but double, and even treble veils, were of no use against it, and when we arrived at the New Jersey Hotel—where, to make matters worse, washing accommodation was of the most primitive—we all looked like Red Indians, and had smarting eyes and lungs full of grit.

I cannot tell you much about the country we passed through, it certainly was rural country of a kind, but we drove so fast (there was no speed limit in New Jersey, and therein lay, I imagine, its chief attraction), that all I can remember, besides the dust, is little wooden houses at intervals with stoops—my first acquaintance with those pleasant adjuncts to a house.

The Clam-bake lunch was partaken of in a large tent on the beach, and the clams were, I was told, baked in the sand on the spot—and oh! we did indeed have clams! huge dishes piled up, with

the things in their shells, placed all down the long bare table, and as soon as one dish was empty another was put in its place. It really was quite unbelievable how many clams those people ate: they sent away plate after plate of empty shells. The clams were accompanied by a kind of tomato sauce, which was good, but I loathed the "things" themselves, and after an attempt to eat two, gave it up altogether. When relay after relay of the enormous dishes of shellfish had been gone through, and the nigger waiter (we were waited on by niggers, another first experience) placed on the table a pumpkin pie, my heart sank; I knew that I shouldn't like *that* either, it was such a truly American dish. However, we also had corn-cobs (which I did not know how to eat, and caused roars of laughter by trying to manipulate with a knife and fork), and mealies with golden syrup, both of which were delicious, so I did very well in the end—and let me say "right here" that I thought American cookery, on the whole, much better than ours; and oh! the cheapness and plenitude of oysters!

After the lunch, and it had taken so long to eat that it was getting dark, came the drive back, and that was really unpleasant, for the cars raced each other all the way, and to play a species of bumping race in a motor, with the possibility of another car coming the opposite way at equal speed any moment, is rather a terrifying experience. However, beyond knocking down (more or less) one telegraph post, no harm was done, and Mr. Brady came round

to each car with a broad grin on his face every time we stopped to "examine injuries," and see how his guests were enjoying themselves. I often think that the kindness with which he treated me in later days may have been owing to the fact that I was not frightened! or, rather, was able to conceal my fright! As a matter of fact, I was so miserable I didn't care what happened—like when one is badly sea-sick and one's only prayer is that the boat may go to the bottom!

One lady of the party, though, actually fainted dead off from fright (I'm not exaggerating), and one of the English actors was so upset (either by nerves or clams) that he returned home, ill, by the very next boat. He said that "if he'd got to die, he'd die, but he wasn't going to do it without a civilised being near him to hold his hand!" I fear that he was not really a sport! for, of course, it was only "sport"; and that touches on my second great impression, namely, America's glorious disregard of human life—the "There-are-lots-more-where-that-came-from" sort of spirit.

But first let me pay my debt to another kind of American hospitality: the "get-near-quick" kind, and a very delightful kind it is. There is no taking a fortnight to ring you up, and another fortnight's notice asking you to dinner there; no, "you meet, you like, you dine," as Julius Cæsar said (or words to that effect). All the same, a lunch with a really busy American business man may be a somewhat quaint experience. I was taken once to a wonderful restaurant by a friend of this description—I was

really hungry and much looked forward to my lunch. My friend picked up the Bill of Fare with the usual "What shall we have?" and I was about to murmur "Oysters," thinking in my greedy mind that "a bird to follow, some other trifle, say grilled mushrooms, with an ice to finish up with, will make a pleasant meal," when he took command, ordered "Porterhouse steak, if it's ready—and be sharp about it"—and nothing else!

"Daren't spend more than twenty minutes over lunch here, you know," he explained, "or they'd think there was nothing doing in business. We can go on to Sherry's for coffee and an ice."

Fancy having to consider one's public to that degree! and to be afraid to "take one's ease at one's inn" for fear that some one seeing it might "bear one's stock" right away!

To return—it really did impress me, the cheapness in which Americans seem to hold life. In our tiny little island, with our (comparatively) tiny population, think what a fuss we make about such a little thing as a man's being knocked down and killed (though certainly motor-cars and omnibuses are now doing their best to cure us of that particular weakness), or of a wretched little railway accident, with only about a dozen injured! Whereas the great American nation never turns a hair when every day it reads about—

"Express jumps bridge into river; 500 killed."

"Great Fire at Pete Sloane's Factory. Pete's Pink Pyjamas. Baby roasted before Mother's eyes," and so on. The American papers would

never sell themselves if they served up such little items as "Man run over by motor-car."

Oh! those American newspapers! They are truly wonderful. I nearly "took a fit," as the Irish say, when I opened my bedroom door the first Sunday morning, and saw the piles of paper on the doormat. I thought the newsagent must have sent me every paper published, but it was merely the two I had ordered, with their endless supplements—pictorial, coloured, and the rest of it. They'd be handy in the arctic regions, where breakfast time is about three weeks long, but I cannot believe that any one can find time to read them in a more normal climate!

Newspapers are certainly one of the things which are cheap and good (more or less) in America. Milk is another.

As for my *Third Impression*, that "Time means money," that speaks for itself, or why such a ceaseless rushing? I wonder if economy of time is also the reason why, when one asks a question of a real down-town business man or boy in New York, and the answer is in the affirmative, one gets a sound that is between a hiccough and a bark snapped at one in reply. Is "Yep" (as sharp as you can) so very much shorter than "Yes" as to make the change worth while?

America was full of contradictions then—possibly it is still; for example, a woman or girl might drink cocktails, as many (and more) than were good for her, in public, from morn till dewy eve (I never saw dew in America, and it sounds so English,

somehow, but no doubt it is there) but she might not smoke. Smoking—for women—was strictly forbidden in all hotels and restaurants. I felt really injured when, after a gay and jolly theatre supper, with lots of champagne, the time came for the men to light their cigars, and I lit my longed-for little cigarette in company, to be immediately pounced upon by the waiter, and looked at askance by the women of the party for daring to do so.

Mrs. Patrick Campbell had a beautiful way of dealing with this prohibition. She would light a cigarette and smoke it quickly until the inevitable waiter arrived with a request to put it out. This Mrs. Campbell firmly declined to do. "Nonsense," she would say, "it's absurd; go and fetch the *maitre d'hotel* to me, he will understand," and while the waiter hurried to fetch his chief, she continued to smoke. When the *maitre d'hotel* arrived, with the request that "Madam would at once throw away her cigarette," she would say, "But surely this is a free country—I thought America was the land of the free?" "That might be," said the worried man, "but smoking for ladies was absolutely forbidden." But Mrs. Campbell insisted that it must be a mistake, she would "speak to the manager himself." When the manager was at last summoned, somewhat irritable, probably, and saying firmly that "Madam really must *not* smoke," she would smile sweetly at him and say, "But I am not smoking, you see—I've finished." She had—by that time!

Another contradiction was, that while the

magazines were very prudish, indeed (I write of a decade or more ago, of course), the stage had much stronger sex plays than were usual in London. *The Easier Way*, for instance, startled me a little when I first heard it, but the theatre was crowded with "flappers" at every performance. No one seemed to think it the least imprudent to let those young girls hear the frankest of frank discussions about "kept ladies," "disorderly houses," and so forth. At the same time, no magazine appealing to the general reader would have dared to publish, say, *The Scarlet Letter*, if that had been written in this century.

It is possible that there may be a slight personal pique about this observation. I offered the magazines a most harmless little Christmas story of my own, about a "Principal Boy" in pantomime, and they all refused it for the same reason (which, of course, my vanity assumes to have been the true one!), that the subject was not one which they could offer to their readers. Indeed, one editor sent for me and told me, most kindly, that he should like to see some more of my stories, only "they must not touch upon politics, religion, or sex: a simple 'Love' story (without sex?) was what would appeal to him most." I never managed to get anything accepted! Please do remember that this was years ago. America's magazines now are among the finest.

The leading lady of New York's most fashionable theatres just then was usually a charming, fluffy little person, weighing about 6 stone 7 lbs. New

York, in this fancy for the toy-terrier type, probably reflected the taste of the most prominent theatrical manager of the time! It seems one of the dispensations of Providence, that histrionic talent of the first order occurs so often in the type of lady whom the theatrical magnate of the moment most admires. I suppose that if any great manager developed a taste for the negroid, we should soon have coal-black leading ladies.

But what, in spite of all its hospitality, I missed most in America was "Home Life"—not the magazine, the real thing; there did not seem to me to be any, it was all rush and restaurants. How can you have a family circle round a steam radiator? You can't. Oh, those radiators! The torrid heat of an American summer (I spent one in New York) may be somewhat alleviated by iced water and constant shower baths, but nothing can alleviate the torrid heat of an American hotel in winter, the whole house is baked through and through; turn off the steam and open the windows on arrival, as you may, it takes hours—if not days—before your room cools down.

When I arrived in Washington, it was under deep snow (and it can be deep there), with snow-ploughs working in the streets, and more snow coming down, and yet I sat for hours at my open window, wearing only my nightie, and with the snow drifting in upon me, before I could get cool enough to sleep. Fact, I assure you.

The chivalry of the American man is possibly a somewhat strange and unaccountable thing, but

it is there, very really there, all the same. I used to walk home from the theatre alone, night after night, and yet I think that only once was I "spoken to"; and I could not say the same for England. This is, perhaps, rather a trivial instance to offer as a proof of chivalry, but about one thing I am certain: American men are absolutely unanimous in their reverence for womanhood—in a lift.

Now, I have no doubt that, as a class, American theatrical managers are no worse than any others, but there are more of them, and, therefore, one may happen to come across one or two rather detestable specimens: horrible, pasty, Hebraic beings, with dull eyes and slug-coloured complexions (you know the type). If you went to see them in their office, they certainly would not rise from their swing chair, they certainly would not take the hat off their heads, or the cigar from their mouths, but would continue to chew it (or gum, as the case might be), and they might quite probably insult you, either by rudeness, or making love; but meet those same men in the lift, going to, or coming from their offices, off would come their hats and be held respectfully in front of them, like a royal footman, in acknowledgement and worship of the holy mystery of Woman embodied in yourself.

Never, never did I see an American man or boy with his hat on in a lift, when a woman was there as well—you could almost see them "thinking of their own old mothers."

Sentimental, possibly, but let my sex be properly grateful if it is only sentiment; only I did wish

sometimes that that same reverence might be extended to female strap-hangers in the subway. It would be more practical there! I hated that subway: the rush, the noise and the blackness, you could hardly ever see, and never hear (to understand) the names of the stations; how any one ever got to their right destination on it, I don't know.

There was one place in New York that I loved, though. One public place, the only one I ever found where real quiet was to be obtained. A hall, all of marble—rare marble brought from far-away countries, a hall so vast that all voices and sounds seemed hushed in it, and with seats where the weary stranger could sit and rest and dream: the dream only broken at intervals by strange mysterious chants, the words of which you could not follow, chanted, it seemed, in an unknown tongue; no, it was not a church—or holy place of any description whatever: it was the Pennsylvanian Railway Station, and the chant was the soft voices of the coloured porters calling out the names of the stopping places of outgoing trains. Of course, if you wanted to go anywhere—such a stupid thing to want to do in such a Hall of Rest!—you had to listen till the right name was called, and then descend into an inferno in which the trains came and went in just the ordinary noisy way, but for an ideal haven of quiet, commend me to the Pennsylvanian Railway Station.

I have talked so much about places that I fear I must leave the theatrical "constellations" which I started to tell you about for another chapter.



CHAPTER XV

American Actors and Actresses—"Romeo and Juliet"—Stars—Grace George—Elsie Ferguson—Sarah Bernhardt in Sydney—Lewis Waller's Hospitality—Mrs. Minnie Madden Fiske—Splendid Isolation—A New Play—Rehearsals—A Failure—Loneliness—The Evangelist.

THERE were many very brilliant actresses playing in New York City (that addition of the word *City* gives such atmosphere!) when I was there. The great Nazimova, for one, Maud Adams, Julia Marlowe, and John Drewe. The latter's company gave splendid performances of Shakespeare, so, of course, did Ada Rehan, though I was never fortunate enough to see her; but, on the whole, I think English people are better satisfied with English actors in the English poet. Perhaps you will think I am biased by my Benson training, but long before that, I remember going to see two American stars who had come over to show us how Shakespeare should be played, and gave us *Romeo and Juliet*.

Their idea of *Romeo and Juliet* was, I imagine, "something human and up to date," a real living drama with a punch in it!

A young couple sat just behind me in the pit, who held hands, and leant shoulders, the whole time (they also sucked bullseyes). At the end of the second act the young man turned to the young woman and said, "Ow—'im!" (with such a world

of expression in his voice), and at the end of the third she turned to him and remarked, "Ow—*er*!" That was all! but I knew their opinion without further words.

This story, of course, has nothing to do with the American actors and actresses of to-day. In fact, I thought their actresses almost better than ours, though I liked their actors less—sex bias? Perhaps.

I never acted in the same company as any of the great ones I have just mentioned, though I had the pleasure of knowing some of them personally, and they were delightful. Nowadays Nazimova has, of course, taken to the Movies, and is so "Great" that I am told that she is a "thing apart"; and requiring, as she does, all her marvellous vitality and youthfulness for the pictures, she lives only for them, and hardly moves, eats, or speaks as an ordinary human being. What a sacrifice on the altar of art!

The American Star system really is an amazing thing when first encountered by an English actress. Miss Grace George, and—even more "starry"—Miss Elsie Ferguson, were the two best exponents of the act of starring that I was ever with, and they were both Star-manageresses, which naturally made—if possible—their position still more exalted. "Stars" have, of course, the largest size of painted stars on their dressing-room doors; that is an insignia of rank which must never be omitted; and on arriving at a theatre, if that star does not happen to be visible, the stage manager hears about it very

forcibly, and it very soon appears in its due position. One never spoke to Stars without being first spoken to! They would arrive at rehearsal (just a little late, of course, to avoid any chance of their being kept waiting—what would have happened if they had been!) and pass through a seated, or standing company, with no one venturing to address them or say "Good-morning." If the Star was in a good humour, she would herself greet her companions and actually joke! But if life was not pleasing her that day, then she would walk straight up to the management table and say sharply, "Can't we begin?" and we knew we were in for an unpleasant hour or two. It really was not bad manners on their part, they were quite charming women when not "shining," it was just the Star system, which their managers imagined enhanced their brightness. They generally had one or more women friends in the company who carried their dogs and heard their woes, and, naturally, as many adorers among the young men as they chose; but I think life must have been very lonely on their exalted peaks all the same, for it must have been difficult to have a real friend.

Of course, Stars in all lands—or over all lands—must be allowed their little ways. I have been told that when Sarah Bernhardt, arriving at Her Majesty's Theatre, Sydney, found the best dressing-room locked up, and was informed that it was always reserved for the actor manager and permanent lessee (the late George Rignold), she sent for an axe, with a strong man attached, and that prohibition

quickly went smash. A lesson the manager richly deserved for his discourtesy.

Lewis Waller, an English Star (but our Star system is a much less rigorous matter), was playing in New York at that time, in *The Butterfly on the Wheel*, with Madge Titheradge and an English company. There always is a big colony of English stage folk in New York, and I think it was larger than usual that year. Sydney Valentine was there, Lyn Harding, Fred Kerr, Charlotte Granville (I never saw that woman in low spirits—such vitality!), and many others, besides the English-American actors, Holbrook Blinn and his wife, and Mr. and Mrs. Frank Mills, who had played so often in England that they were old friends. Waller saw to it that we were not dull. One special New Year's party which he gave, was the first time I had ever seen Jazz danced between the courses at supper. It was a pink night!

Miss Gertrude Elliott, also, was starring under Mr. Frohman at that time, and later I had a very pleasant tour with her. I should like to claim her as "English," but, at least, she was most unlike the regulation American Star-manageress. She was sympathetic and charming with every one. The beautiful Maxine Elliott, who adored her "Baby Sister," often came to see us—such an interesting personality!

Mrs. Minnie Madden Fiske was another Star with whom I had two engagements. She was a real Star—a really fine actress with a real reputation, which surely needed no bolstering from the "Star

system." But she got it! Heavens, I should think she did! I cannot believe that it was her own wish; probably she did not think much about the matter, for she left all business to other people. She was a delightful woman, always cheerful and untroubled, and so kind and sympathetic. Mr. Harrison Gay Fiske, her husband, was her manager, and stage-managed her off the stage as well as on. For instance, when the company were assembled at the railway station she would arrive, heavily veiled (a fact, I assure you—the public might be suspected of a wish to stare), and surrounded by her maid (coloured), her business manager, her large husband, and her large dog, she would hastily be escorted to the private carriage reserved for her; if she passed you on the way to it, it was etiquette to avoid catching her eye, she might have felt obliged to make the effort of bowing if she had seen you! And in the private carriage she remained the whole live-long day and night, for meals and sleep, alone—presumably meditating upon her art.

Mr. Fiske would generally come and join the company in the big saloon, particularly when certain attractive young actresses were with us. I often used to wonder if the little goddess in the private cabin might not have liked occasionally to join us, too—she had a delightful sense of humour.

My first engagement with the Fiskes was in a play by a young and rising dramatist who had just had one very big success, and much was therefore expected of him. The play was brilliantly written, and a very distinguished and carefully selected

company was engaged (my part was that of an English woman). At the reading of the first act by Mr. Fiske, I never heard a company laugh so much, and it was not complimentary laughter either—we were really amused. Rehearsals of the first act went splendidly, a long run seemed certain, and every one was in a state of delightful amiability. Then came the reading of the second act, and though we laughed again, something felt flat somehow, and during rehearsals—such long rehearsals!—of the third and fourth acts, quieter and quieter grew the company, more and more difficult the producer (Mr. Fiske). Cuts were made, scenes altered, until when the first night came we were all to pieces and the play fell flatter than ditch water. I don't know whether it was the fault of the play—it certainly seemed brilliant—or whether it was the flatness of the acting from over-rehearsal that killed it.

We opened at Pittsburg, and rehearsed the whole day without pause till about six o'clock, and by that time we were all so tired that some of the company lay flat in the wings from sheer exhaustion; our brains were addled, and our parts so cut about we felt we did not know a word of them. Poor Hetty Russell, in fact, did "dry up" hopelessly, for there is nothing so difficult as having the middle of one's lines cut out, and only the heads and tails of sentences left.

Hetty was a splendid-looking woman. Her stage name was not Rehan, but she was Ada Rehan's sister, and was considered like her. She

was a perfect picture of what a stage *grande dame* should be: tall, with fine features and beautiful white hair—naturally, she was very proud of that hair, and used to take it down at every possible opportunity, and sometimes at rather impossible ones, such as at rehearsal, or in a station waiting-room, and give it a sort of Harlene drill, without the Harlene. She called it “airing it” (no pun intended), and though at times slightly conspicuous, the result was vastly picturesque.

The failure of the play was a dreadful disappointment, and though it ran for six weeks at Chicago afterwards, it was never taken to New York, and the engagement came to an end without some of the ladies of the company having saved enough to pay for the grand dresses they had bought for it. I think actresses should never be expected to find their own dresses, unless they are earning a Star salary, in which case, of course, they would *be* Stars, and would not find so much as a pair of silk stockings, unless they wished!

We used to play on Sundays in Chicago, and it has made me a firm opponent of the opening of theatres on Sundays ever since—looking at it from the actor’s point of view. One felt so weary and squalid, without a single break in the week.

I liked Chicago otherwise. The Lake is so wonderful. Pittsburg, too, I liked, in spite of its dirt and blackness; I thought it one of the beauty spots of America, with the marvellous effects of the furnace fires at night. But Boston, of all the

cities, I found the most attractive, probably because, apart from its associations, it most reminded me of England. Oh! how lonely one can get, living constantly in strange hotels, in strange towns, where one does not know a soul except the company; one night at dinner I actually found myself listening to a jazz band, and dropping tears into my soup with maudlin self-pity! Then I knew it was time to "get a move on" and come home—and I did.

The theatre in America has to face a good deal of—in the language of trade unions—"blackleg" competition, but it seems to flourish mightily in spite of it.

The theatrical spirit of many of the churches and missionary bodies in any other country would badly affect the theatre box office, but in "God's Own Country" it seems to make little difference. I was once taken to see a very famous peripatetic evangelist, who was holding forth in a huge circus tent out Hoboken way. I am not sure whether my friend paid for us to go in or whether the "show" relied entirely upon a voluntary collection; but it was worth any money as broad farce, that is if your feeling of reverence could be sent to sleep sufficiently for a broadly farcical treatment of religion to be enjoyed.

The evangelist simply took a chapter of the Bible and translated it into American "gaff," with lots of baseball slang, and most of the audience appreciated it hugely.

At one point, a man—probably a "canary"—

interrupted, and accused the evangelist of having taken 2000 dollars out of the last town where he had pitched his tent.

"You're a gold-darned liar," returned the evangelist briskly. "It was 5000 dollars I took. I tell you, the Almighty is the best cash employer in this country, and I'm doing His work."

CHAPTER XVI

One Night Stands—Dirt and Demoralisation—A Mummer's Day—Sleeping Cars—"Do as you would be done by"—Black Stewards—A Horrible Story—The Statue of Liberty—"The American-British Friendship League."

LONELINESS, one of the chief drawbacks to touring in America, is, no doubt, largely a matter of temperament; to the properly poised mind there is possibly no such thing. However that may be, the other drawback to touring, namely "one night stands," is not at all a matter of temperament, but a matter of dirt.

They entail night travel, and by the time one has travelled all night for a few weeks on end, one's self-respect is apt to wane and disappear, in the hopeless fight to keep decently clean.

This is the sort of life: On arriving at some small, wood-built town in the early hours of the morning, you make a dash for the best hotel, in the hope (generally disappointed) that it will contain a bathroom, and that the water will be hot: you wash, breakfast, then have to go down to the theatre to change your linen, or dress, because only the smallest "grip-sack" can be taken with you on the train, and you must always be prepared to carry it yourself, porters and cabs being unavailable, at the hour at which your train arrives. Everything, therefore, except absolute toilet

necessaries, has to be packed in your theatre box. Having changed, and recovered a little self-respect, if you are wise, and wealthy, you take a bedroom and lie down for a few hours of comfort, but if finances do not warrant this extravagance, then you must walk about the dull little town—(I used to wonder what those towns existed for—or on)—and kill time until you return to the theatre for the performance in the evening. After that, another dash—back to the station this time—a hunt for your train in an obscure siding, and into the Pullman for yet another night's journey.

Beautiful scenery and interesting places—though there are many—leave one cold under these conditions, and with only one great longing: to soak and soak in a hot, scented bath, till the grime of travel is out of one's system.

What a disgracefully long grumble about a small matter! After all, no one need go touring unless they wish to: there are other ways of earning a living, and the long distances between places make the discomfort of night travel inevitable. But there is one thing about travelling in America which I really think might be better managed—I mean their Pullman sleeping cars.

Without being too early Victorian or prudish, I do like a certain amount of privacy when I go to bed—and surely it might be possible to arrange separate sleeping carriages for men and women.

The first night that I spent in an American Pullman, I sat up in my little bunk-cupboard, and smoked and laughed to myself, it seemed so funny

and so exciting; but the excitement very soon palled! It is not nice when, after a dirty day of travelling, you at last creep into your berth (taking your coat and dress and dusty boots with you, for there is nowhere else to leave them—the public dressing-room would certainly not be safe) to have the curtain covering it pushed in upon you, just as you are dropping off to sleep, while the stage carpenter, or property man, hot and odorous from his recent labours, climbs into the berth above you! And it is not nice to encounter so many strange and most unattractive-looking men (the poor dears can't help being unattractive: they are as unwashed as you are) when making your way to the inadequate dressing-room in the morning.

Of course, it was necessary to have a sleeping-berth for night journeys to obtain any sort of comfort, and the price of them was deducted from one's salary at the end of the week—unless one knew the ropes and had stipulated for "sleeping-berths found" before signing the contract.

This was a little hard upon the smaller salaried members of the company, because, unless they could afford to pay the extra for a sleeping-berth there was nowhere for them to sit all night (except the smoking-room) all the day seats in the Pullman having been turned into sleeping-berths—two rows down each side of the corridor, with a curtain over each. The short-of-cash, therefore, often compromised by sharing a berth, a sort of head-to-feet arrangement, that I never tried myself, but

imagine to have been far from comfortable. If, on the contrary, you were "in cash" and could afford it, you booked a whole section, both the upper and lower berth, and then you had more room, more air, and more decency, and ran no risk of strange, and possibly undesirable, people climbing up over you after you had retired to rest.

I once found one of the ladies of the company sitting up all night in the smoking-room; she said that a young couple had taken the upper berth of her "section," and such a lot of rice had fallen out of their clothes that, though it wasn't really comfy for her sitting up all night, she reckoned it'd be a deal more comfy for them not to have to climb over her to roost in the top berth. "After all," said the dear thing, "you aren't married every day."

But in real earnest, what I most objected to in the arrangement of American sleeping-cars, was being waited on by a black man as steward; surely women stewards might be travelled on night trains, in case of illness, or if the women passengers require anything while in bed. I hated being obliged to rely on a nigger for the opening or shutting of my berth window (and one cannot grapple with those windows oneself), or whatever else was needed, after I had retired.

I think that America might well make a change here, but perhaps she has already done so, as more than ten years have passed since I travelled in one of their sleeping-cars.

I heard a dreadful story in this connection,

which I was assured was true, and it haunted me on every night journey afterwards.

It was in the early days of Pullman cars and a young couple on their honeymoon were travelling in one. The bride was very young and very charming; she had prepared for the night in the ladies' dressing-room, and now, with brown curls, tied with a blue ribbon, hanging to her waist, and little blue ribbon bows all down the front of her frilled white *peignoir*, she looked lovely enough to warrant the worship with which her young husband regarded her. There were only a few other passengers in the car, and they had already retired behind their curtains. The girl, half-laughing, but half-disgusted, commented upon the black steward. "It seemed so funny," she said, "to have a man, and a nigger, bringing hot water into the dressing-room! and he stared at me so, it was quite horrid. Dad would never have permitted such a thing 'way down at home."

"He wasn't impertinent, was he?" the young man flushed angrily.

"Oh, no, he only stared, but I rather hated it."

"I expect that he never saw anything so pretty as you before; took you for an angel, perhaps," laughed the adoring husband. "Now, you won't be frightened in the night, will you? I shall be quite close at hand, sleeping just at your feet. You see, you've only got to rap the partition at the bottom of your bunk and I shall hear." He took

her in his arms for a good-night embrace, and then the girl crept into her berth.

"All right, my sweetheart?" he asked, as he drew the curtains. "Now mind and rap if you want anything." Then he, too, got into his berth and was soon fast asleep.

.

During the night, horror—unspeakable horror—happened. Down the dimly-lit corridor stole a shape, white uniformed, an evil smile upon its black face. Something—a folded cloth—was in its hand. The train was dashing along on a non-stopping run, nothing could be heard but the sound of the wheels and engine; softly the evil thing crept along the corridor, softly the curtains, behind which slept the little bride, were opened. A glance inside, then the hand holding the cloth did its work; there was a smothered shriek, drowned by the noise of the train; the curtain was shaken by a frantic struggle; a white hand waved outside it for a moment; waved more and more feebly, then was still. The chloroform had done its work.

.

In the morning the bride awoke. Where was she? She felt so ill. Ah! of course, she was on her honeymoon—she had been married yesterday. But why did her head ache so, and what was that strange smell? A horrible, sickening smell! The air seemed full of it, like—chloroform! Remembrance flooded upon her. With a maniac's shriek she rushed to the end of the car, trying to jump

from the train. She was prevented. But in the city of St. Louis they still point out a window (I saw it myself) where for fifty years the face of a mad woman was to be seen behind the heavy bars, and tell how, twice in every year, a tall gentleman visited the house, and left it always more crushed and broken, until he died.

.

As I sailed past the Statue of Liberty, and looked at her from the window of a cabin, full of flowers and fruit and chocolates (the graceful giving of such things to friends is another point on which, without doubt, Americans excel us), I wondered if perhaps they had not made her just a little too large!—at present.

Talking of travelling, there was a delightful society in New York when I was there: it called itself the "American-British Friendship League." Its chief activities were "To cement the Friendship between the two Countries by seeing visitors off when they left." Quite so.

CHAPTER XVII

Stage Life and Temptations—Son or Daughter—The Real Peril—Enlarged Ego—Successful Actors—and their Wives—A Matinée Idol—An Old Actress—No Actor—Mrs. Kendal's Wisdom—Friends.

I ONCE knew an old gentleman who, when his son informed him that he wished to go on the stage, exclaimed,—

“Rather would I see you in your coffin.”

He really did say this, but then he was Irish, and thought dramatically. Later on he used to go to see his son act, and be extremely proud to let every one know of the relationship.

He was a witty old gentleman, too. Once when he did not approve of the action of the Irish members (there were “Irish members” then), he said,—

“And it’s well for them to be selling their country, what else have the poor creatures got to sell?”

So I hold my little brief for the Mummer’s life; at its worst it is laughter-loving; surely that is something in these sad days, and if I were a mother I would most certainly rather see son or daughter of mine on the stage, than in a great many other places—not to mention coffins! But I think I would rather see my girl there than her brother!

Of course, there are temptations in the life of an

actress—in what life are there not ? But if a girl is made of such delicate moral fibre that she is unable to withstand temptation, then she must be treated as an invalid and go on crutches all her life.

It is not in environment, but in temperament, that temptation lies.

My reason for not liking stage life for a boy, as a rule, has nothing to do with moral dangers (why is it, I wonder, that the word "moral" always suggests the seventh commandment ?), but because of its possible effect on his character. I say this with the full consciousness that many of my best friends are actors, sheltering myself behind the saving clause "as a rule."

A well-known actor once confessed to me that he was horrified to find that, even when kneeling beside what he thought to be the death-bed of his wife—a wife whom he really loved—he was half-unconsciously studying the effect of his sorrow on himself, noting how it felt to see a loved one die, in order that he might the more convincingly portray the emotion on the stage.

That is horrible—and though super-self-analysis is a complaint to which actresses as well as actors are liable, the effect upon the character, of confusing real with simulated emotion, is probably more deteriorating in the case of a man.

Women always act, more or less—it is natural enough that they should under present social conditions; they try to charm, to be attractive—and why not ? but for a man so to study his own inner workings, to study how to consciously

fascinate, for example, seems a rather different matter, and the better the actor the greater the danger, or perhaps, I should say, the more successful the actor. (And if a boy is not going to be successful on the stage, why let him go there ?)

The logical conclusion of this homily would seem to be a reversal of the old practice, of all male actors, into one of—all female! which, of course, is *reductio ad absurdum*. I own myself a woman convinced of error, but “of the same opinion still,” and, surely, the idea which some successful actors seem to hold of their own importance as a world-pivot, does just a little lack a sense of humour,—or is it a sense of proportion ?

The other night, for instance, I was at a party where a charming and popular young actress, surrounded by young people, was playing some game or other, when a much-admired actor manager passed the group.

“Julia dear,” (not her name, of course), “I want you,” he said, and sank into an armchair at a little distance. She at once broke through the group and hurried to him.

“I may have something for you in my next play: come and see me on Thursday morning,” said the Great One. Quite so—and very nice for her—but, why quite so much display of power in public ?

I have even seen one of those little Tin Gods get up from a supper which was being held for charity and leave the room, exclaiming that “the whole thing was a swindle,” because his table was not receiving what he considered proper attention

from the waiter! And yet, they are really quite nice men, but perhaps they allow their sense of niceness to become a tiny bit obscured now and again by the clouds of incense which constantly float around them.

If only the wives, or other female belongings, of some of these dear creatures would just occasionally sit on their heads to avoid over-expansion, all would be well, instead of which many wives are the worst offenders and the most devout worshippers at their husbands' shrines.

A little while ago I was at a dinner at which the adoring wife of an actor manager was also a guest. She was "shining with all her might" in his reflected glory, and we got just a little tired of "Darrell says," "Darrell does," as the ultimate referendum for everything. That morning the *Times*—and the *Times* only—had published what, if correct, was a very important political announcement, and at last, possibly to steer "Mrs. Star" away from her favourite topic, some one asked her if she had read the paragraph in question.

"Oh, no," she said, "I never read anything but the *Morning Post*. Darrell is a real Die-Hard, you know."

"Really?" said our hostess sweetly. "I thought his play was such a success!"

I fear that I am beginning to play with my claws out! Just one more little true story on the subject, and I have done.

A very young actress, leaving the theatre, ran into the *Matinée Idol* at the stage door:—

M. I. : Hello, little girl, where are you off to?

Young Actress (flattered at being addressed) : I am just going to lunch with Jimmie Short, Mr. —.

M. I. (facetiously) : Ah! He's a sad dog, Jimmie! Mind you are good.

Young Actress (very frivolously) : Oh! I'll be good—for your sake.

M. I. (regarding her severely) : Don't be sycophantic, child."

Well, well! It is easy enough to laugh at them, these idols of the stage; after all, inflated ego is common enough in all professions, and it is probably not their fault if they imagine most women to be in love with them.

A delightful old actress said to me the other day (and though she is delightful she is no longer young, and at no time, I think, can have been beautiful):—

"The women do run after him so, dear; he's downright frightened of them nowadays. Why, would you believe it, he never comes into even my dressing-room without propping open the door!"

I once went to the Law Courts to hear a libel action. A provincial theatrical manager was suing for damages because some one had said, or written, that his theatre was insanitary. (He lost his action, I may say.) Some members of Mr. and Mrs. Kendal's company were called as witnesses for the defence. One of them was a charming boy, with big blue eyes and the face of a baby cherub. The counsel for the prosecution examined him rather severely, endeavouring to shake his evidence,

but without avail. At last counsel said pointedly, "Ah! You are an actor, are you not?"

Cherub : No.

Counsel : You don't act on the stage?

Cherub : No.

Counsel : You mean, seriously, to tell me, that you do not appear on the stage in various characters?

Cherub : Oh! yes, I do that right enough.

Counsel : Then how dare you tell me that you are not an actor?

The babe opened still wider his big blue eyes, and turned on the judge a face of infantine innocence, before replying:—

"Mrs. Kendal says I'm not."

What Mrs. Kendal (who genuinely liked the boy) had actually said, was:—

"You may paint your face and call yourself a man, but an actor you're not—and never will be."

She was quite right, and the cherub is now a most successful business man. Does he find the blue-eyed trick still useful, I wonder?

One other remark of Mrs. Kendal's I remember, which she said to me in the days when I was a beginner.

"The Stage is difficult water to steer in; take my advice—*think* what you like, but don't say it."

And I have not taken that advice, alas! Hence this book!

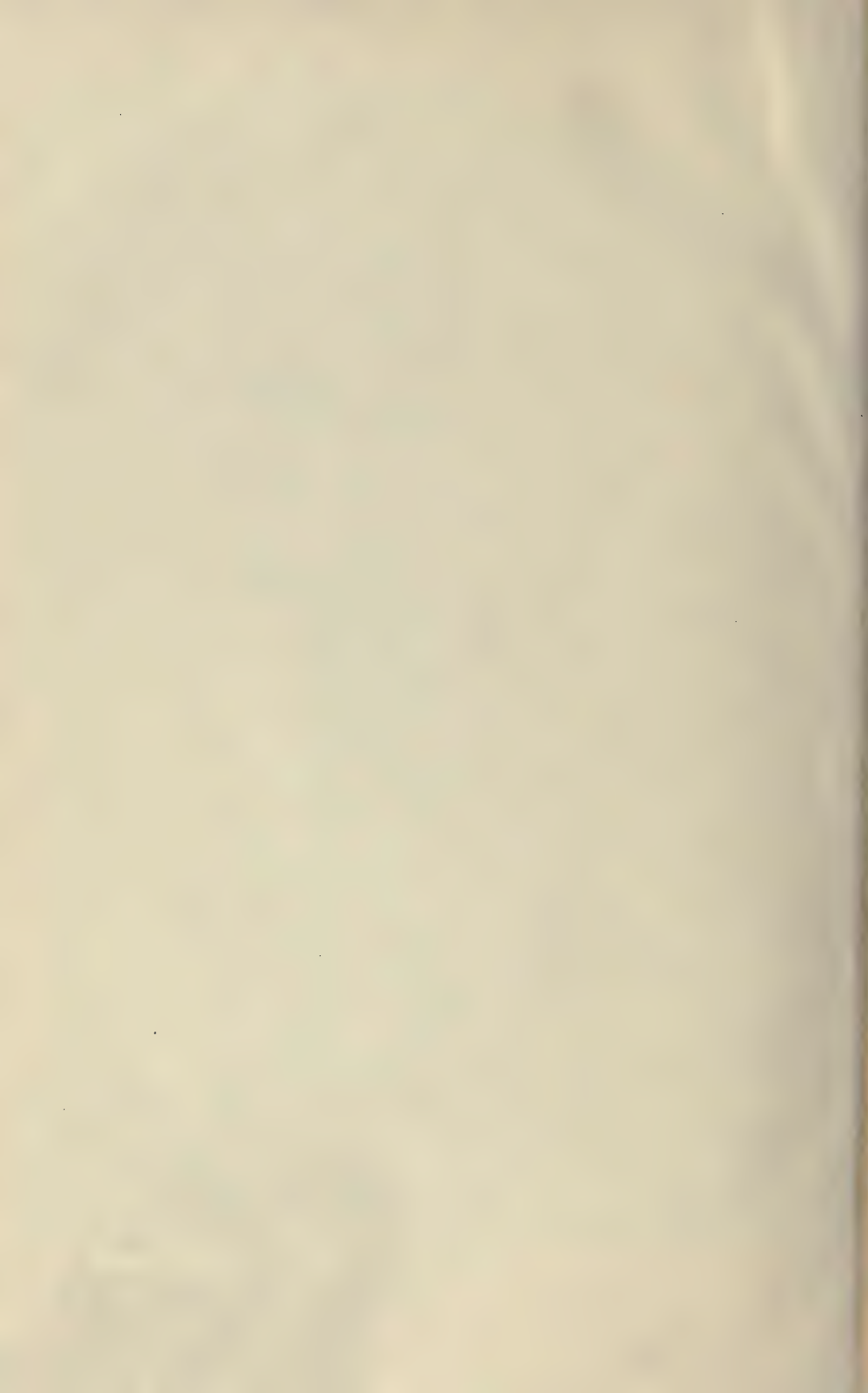
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And now the Final Curtain must be rung down, reluctantly on my part—it has been so pleasant to me, recalling all these old friends; but before its



Mrs. Kendal in *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*.

To face page 230.



fall separates me altogether from my audience, I should like to show them one little scene, of a circle of friends who used to meet, before War, with its smashing and separating forces altered all our lives.

It is evening in a tiny flat, so tiny that there is only room for three comfortable chairs round the fire, and the rest of the circle lounge about on stools or cushions on the floor. The electric lights are switched off, the firelight alone is enough to talk by, and to-night the fire is of logs, too pretty a fire to be wasted. Seated in one of the chairs is an adorable morsel of daintiness, with brown eyes and yellow hair, whom one of us has christened "The Dissipated Primrose"—the name fits her well, but her real one is Charlotte Besier. In the second chair is a supremely contented Me; and in the third, a tall, handsome young man, with waving hair and a slightly foreign-looking face, who, in a beautiful voice, is "telling poetry" to us; wave after wave of it—the whole of *Marpessa*, perhaps (it was before Stephen Phillips came to be regarded as somewhat of a back number—as if the imagination which conceived the line, "Of women who remember in the night," can ever be altogether a back number); bits from *Paradise Lost*, or Shelley, or Herrick; almost anything that we asked for. For when he was in the mood there seemed no poem that he could not remember and say to us. And that is Rudolf Besier—the author, even then, of three successful plays: *The Virgin Goddess*, *Lady Patricia*, and *Don*.

Then from the rug, where he has been lying with his arm round the white neck of Dulcie, and his head resting on hers, arises a small, black-haired man, with blazing eyes and crimson mouth, and a voice, not musical, but so arresting. It is Ralph Hodgson, poet and seer—and Dulcie, fairest and most treasured of her sex, is a huge, pure-bred bull terrier. Beauty—poetry—again beauty—bull terriers and prize-fighting, were the gods of R. H.'s idolatry—half faun, half fay, half little furry animal, half angel from heaven that he was in those days. And when he was not writing, or smoking the strongest and rankest shag, he loved to attend prize fights, or exercise (to the terror of other dog-owners) his bull terriers, of which he had two, and sometimes three. He kept them with him, even when he was living in a small town flat! He understood them and adored them, and, of course, they adored him, but they did not adore any one else, not to any considerable extent, at least!—and he was always getting into trouble owing to their fighting propensities; also, I suspect that they slept on the best bed, and ate the cutlet and he the biscuit whenever their Royal fancy so dictated.

Perhaps on this night he caps Rudolf's recital with more verses. Perhaps he argues about the use of a word in one of them (any word of more than three syllables he was always inclined to wage war against; and he once promised to write me a whole poem in words of only two), or maybe he lets fly, in a fury of indignation, about some lately happened wrong to man, bird, or beast;

more especially furious his onslaught if the wrong had been done to one of the latter. How could it be otherwise from the writer of *The Journeyman*?

“Not baser than his own, home-keeping, kind,
Whose journeyman he is.
Blind sons and breastless daughters of the blind
Whose darkness pardons his.
About the world, while all the world approves,
The Pimp of Fashion steals,
With all the angels mourning their dead loves
Behind his bloody heels.”

The last two lines are sadly calculated to destroy one's pleasure in the wearing of one's fur coat! As for rare bird's plumage—but no—no friend of R. H. ever wore that.

At another time, perhaps he would be utterly frivolous, making absurd jokes, or repeating some ridiculous rhyme, which he would tell us that “Dulcie” had written, shouting with laughter, until we had to shut all the windows of the flat for fear of disturbing our neighbours. And, even so, the old gentleman living in the flat above us used occasionally to rap on the floor for quiet!

Sometimes—but on such rare occasions—when the night had grown very young, some trick of atmosphere, some word said, and the mood descended upon him and he would *talk*. Talk as I have never heard any one else—winged words—the message of *The Song of Honour* before the poem itself was ever written—and then, the curtain

which hides life's puzzle would seem to lift for a moment, and all be clear and plain. And at last, when the wee hours were getting big, and the cigarettes all smoked and the coffee drunk (R. H. always had to have a special pot of coffee for himself, he drank so much of it), a sweet voice, with the southern Irish brogue to it, would come from a hitherto quiet corner.

"Children, it's time to go home," and length after length would uncoil himself from the floor—the tallest, thinnest, most ethereal of boys, with long expressive hands, and fair hair brushed off his forehead (worn rather long, too, and always, at so late an hour, tumbled into a "drake's tail" at the back), with blue, shortsighted eyes behind glasses, and a wonderful charm of both face and personality—and that was Lennox Robinson, the Irish dramatist, who has given us *Patriots*, *The White-Headed Boy*, and *The Lost Leader*.

And "so to bed."

Yes. Life is interesting to look back upon, and maybe it is worth living, if only to meet so many friends.

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